



Re-contextualising the Spectacle of Online Gastronomy:
A Studio Investigation into Contemporary Food Imaging

by

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Abstract

This studio-based research project examines the pictorial compositions of contemporary food imaging. It investigates how painting and time-based media can effectively reframe identified visual tropes to broaden understanding around the shifting forms of food representation. The research is focused on high-end food imagery, which represents the rise of autonomous visual-based food genres online, including, but not limited to, chef websites, curated image feeds and food porn. Explored through a dual-medium approach, this thesis identifies how the interactive practices of digital media, image manipulation and social media, are redefining photographic representation within this genre. This includes examining the application of exaggerated pictorial tropes, design, styling and performative elements and their role in visually rendering an era aspiring to high-end sensorial experiences.

Pictorial analysis, supported by Roland Barthes, Kenneth Bendiner, Norman Bryson, and Hal Foster, identifies a continuation of imaging trends between contemporary and historical food representations. Trends include routinely applied modes of creative disruption, such as embellishment, compositional framing and the use of props to choreograph images. Historical artworks from the seventeenth-century by Dutch still life painters Pieter de Ring and Joachim Beuckelaer, as well as Post-Impressionistic works by Paul Cézanne, inform the analysis and are examined as key cultural markers. The research is structured around four conceived stylistic image frameworks - entertainment, authenticity, mastery and innovation - which suggest that contemporary food imagery normalises exaggerated visual tropes in order to activate desire-based triggers of aspiration and reassurance.

The research is framed through the cultural theory discourse of food imagery as outlined by Anne McBride, Erin McDonnell, Signe Rousseau and Yasmin Ibrahim, examining food porn and social media. This discussion considers representation as a form of critique and is explored through works by Audrey Flack and Richard Prince, specifically in the context of photography's subjective role in constructing meaning through image making that assists society to perceive the world. Further contextualisation situates the research within the collaborative space of food and fine art, as well as through curated exhibitions, such as *Harvest*, hosted by the Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) in Brisbane, and fine art dinners, which accompany exhibitions, such as *Rembrandt and the Dutch Golden Age* hosted by the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), Sydney. Studio methodologies of painted hyper-realism, photographic re-contextualisation and digital manipulation are viewed in relation to the choreographed design of fashion-based images, as evidenced through the works of photographers Aleksandra Kingo, Maurizio Di Iorio and Jess Bonham, who embrace an idealistic and mannered aesthetic.

Through the analogue medium of paint and the digital technologies of camera and computer, artworks within this thesis present a multi-textured exploration of hyper-realistic representation. They aim to activate a sense of the uncanny by de-contextualising gesture through animation and looping, as well as through painted digital styling. The application of painted and photographic representation examines the varying degrees of collapsed and expanded critical distance that the viewer maintains with contemporary images.

The research proposes that through digital technologies and increased dissemination online, food imaging has evolved to become an essential part of the online visual economy. This studio-based research contributes to the contemporary cultural discourse on food representation by analysing the visual tropes of food imaging and the influence of digital technologies on its aesthetic evolution.

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List of Illustrations

- Figure 1: John Thomson, *The Fruits of China*, 1873-74
- Figure 2: Margaret Fulton, *Italian Pizzeria*, 1968
- Figure 3: Margaret Fulton, *Jewelled Rice with Vegetable Date Kebabs*, 1968
- Figure 4: Donna Hay, *Chocolate-Dusted Pavlovas*, 2016
- Figure 5: Pieter de Ring, *Still Life with Golden Goblet*, 1640-1660
- Figure 6: Joachim Beuckelaer, *Kitchen Scene with Christ at Emmaus*, c. 1560-1565
- Figure 7: Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Jar, Cup, and Apples*, c. 1877
- Figure 8: Food image under the frame of *Innovation*
- Figure 9: Food image under the frame of *Entertainment*
- Figure 10: Food image under the frame of *Mastery*
- Figure 11: Food image under the frame of *Authenticity*
- Figure 12: Food image that displays *Nostalgia*
- Figure 13: *GastroArt*, Instagram Feed, 2018
- Figure 14: *Foodstarz_official*, Instagram Feed, 2018
- Figure 15: Alexander Coosemans, *Still Life*, c. 1650
- Figure 16: Josh Lopez, *Thangool Squab* (photographed by Shane Holzberger), 2015
- Figure 17: *Art Gallery of New South Wales*, Twitter Feed, 2017
- Figure 18: *Gourmetartistry*, Instagram Feed, 2016
- Figure 19: *Foodartchefs*, Instagram Feed, 2015
- Figure 20: Michael Crichton and Leigh MacMillan, *Conceptual Food*, 2016
- Figure 21: Aleksandra Kingo, *House of Peroni Editorial*, 2015
- Figure 22: Kia Utzon-Frank, Owen Silverwood and Dunja Opalko, *Kufcakes*, 2017
- Figure 23: Jess Bonham, *Measures of Quality - Whiskey Sour*, 2013
- Figure 24: Jess Bonham, *Measures of Quality - Margarita*, 2013
- Figure 25: Maurizio Di Iorio, *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin Editorial*, 2016
- Figure 26: Maurizio Di Iorio, *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin Editorial*, 2016
- Figure 27: Don Eddy, *G-III*, 1979
- Figure 28: Audrey Flack, *Bounty*, 1978
- Figure 29: Darko Kontin, *Salami Platter for Croatian Food Company*, 2017
- Figure 30: Nightflare Creative, *Fig Salad*, 2017
- Figure 31: Alex Davies, *Waffle Pancakes*, 2017
- Figure 32: Nathan Taylor, *Untitled III*, 2017

- Figure 33: Nathan Taylor, *Untitled II*, 2017
- Figure 34: Nathan Taylor, *Untitled I*, 2017
- Figure 35: Richard Hamilton, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* 1956
- Figure 36: Parmigianino, *The Madonna with the Long Neck*, c. 1535-1540
- Figure 37: Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Vertumnus (Emperor Rudolf II)*, 1590
- Figure 38: Richard Prince, *New Portraits (Installation view)*, 2014
- Figure 39: *GastroArt*, Instagram Image, 2016
- Figure 40: Agnar Sverrisson, *Grain-fed beef fillet with olive oil sabayon and red wine sauce*, 2014
- Figure 41: Nathan Taylor, *Study X (Entrée)*, 2016
- Figure 42: Richard van Oostenbrugge, *North Sea Crab with Smoked Avocado*, 2015
- Figure 43: Nathan Taylor, *Study XI (Main Course)*, 2016
- Figure 44: Curtis Duffy, *Dark Chocolate, Cherries and Hazelnuts*, 2014
- Figure 45: Nathan Taylor, *Study XII (Dessert)*, 2017
- Figure 46: Nathan Taylor, *Untitled II* and *Untitled I (Details)*, 2017
- Figure 47: Nathan Taylor, *Study VI*, 2015
- Figure 48: Nathan Taylor, *Study VII*, 2015
- Figure 49: Nathan Taylor, *Study VIII*, 2015
- Figure 50: Nathan Taylor, *Study IX*, 2015
- Figure 51: Nathan Taylor, *Study VII, VIII and IX (Installation view)*, 2015
- Figure 52: Nathan Taylor, *Study XIII*, 2016
- Figure 53: *Simplistic_Food*, Instagram Image, 2016
- Figure 54: Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 3 (Strawberry Froth)*, 2017
- Figure 55: Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 1 (Pink Fish)*, 2017
- Figure 56: Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 7 (Butterfly Pea Tea)*, 2018
- Figure 57: Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 6 (Poached Pear)*, 2018
- Figure 58: Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 2 (Mushroom and Lotus Root)*, 2017
- Figure 59: Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 5 (Assorted Gastronomy)*, 2017
- Figure 60: Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 4 (Smoked Panna Cotta)*, 2017

Table of Contents

Statement of Originality	ii
Authority of Access	iii
Statement Regarding Published Work Contained in Thesis	iv
Statement of Co-Authorship	v
Abstract	vi
Acknowledgments	ix
List of Illustrations	x
Table of Contents	xii

Introduction	1
Project Outline	1
Research Parameters	5
Key Terms	6
Exegesis Structure	7

PART 1	13
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Chapter 1: Food Imaging and Food Porn	13
Introduction	13
Theoretical Framework and Pictorial Analysis	15
The Development of Modern Food Imaging	16
Cookbooks: From Instruction to Inspiration	18
Food Advertising and Chef as Celebrity	21
Contemporary Food Imaging: Popular versus Porn	23
Fantasy and indulgence	24
Sex, intimacy or desire	26
Design and styling	28
Conclusion	30

Chapter 2: Four Image Frameworks	32
Introduction.....	32
Food Representation in Art History	34
Stylistic frameworks	41
Innovation through abstract appeal	41
Entertainment and the visual feast	42
Mastery and exhibiting talent.....	44
Authenticity and rustic charm	45
Photographic Image as Trace	47
Digital Food Engagement and Dissemination	50
High-end Aesthetics.....	52
Conclusion	54
 Chapter 3: Curating Food and Fashion Imaging.....	57
Introduction.....	57
The Food / Art Collaboration.....	58
Curating Visual Engagement	59
Curated exhibitions	59
Curated art dinners	62
Curated insta-food.....	65
Fashion-based Food Imaging	67
Designing the spectacle.....	67
Everything new is old	71
Expanding Photography and the Animated GIF	74
The Cinemagraph.....	76
Conclusion	80
 PART 2.....	83
 Chapter 4: Entertainment	83
Introduction.....	83
Analogue versus Digital.....	84

Re-contextualising Digital Manipulations	90
Choreographed Intimacy	96
Revealing Implausibility	97
Conclusion	99
Chapter 5: Authenticity	101
Introduction	101
Appropriation	102
Photographic appropriation	103
Appropriation within food media	104
Re-contextualisation	105
Three-course meal	106
Entrée	107
Main Course	110
Dessert	112
Creative Trace	114
Conclusion	116
Chapter 6: Mastery	118
Introduction	118
Hyper-realism	119
Refinement and Embellishment	120
Ritual and Control	126
Pursuit of Perfection	129
Conclusion	132
Chapter 7: Innovation	134
Introduction	134
Visual Abstraction	135
Cinemagraphic Research	136
Prepping, plating and performing	137
Preservation through the loop	140

De-contextualising gesture through stillness and movement.....	143
The uncanny.....	146
Conclusion	149
 Chapter 8: Conclusion	 151
Studio Research	154
Presenting and Re-Presenting	157
Shifting Time	158
Future Space of Food	160
 Bibliography	 164
 APPENDICES	 176
Completed Studio Work	176
List of Submitted Work	182
Examination Exhibition Installation Views	184
Associated Research Projects and Activities	187
Curriculum Vitae	188

Introduction

Art has long served to visualise the symbolic relationship between culture and food. Within popular food media, the photographic image contextualises the multiple textures that govern, represent and influence our cultural interactions with both food and media (Goodman et al., 2017). Visual content posted on social media platforms, such as Instagram and Pinterest, reveal how online genres of food imaging are rapidly expanding. Online food media thus becomes a rich space to explore the employment of creative strategies within contemporary imaging. However, limited attention has been given to design, styling and creative manipulation, which underpin these strategies and guide the various forms of representation. This research project critically examines the widespread employment of digital technologies to visually augment and disseminate contemporary food imaging.

This introduction will firstly outline my research topic. It will then discuss research parameters that have defined its structure and approach, as well as specific terms used throughout the exegesis. Details of the exegesis layout will then be discussed, including a summary of methodologies and creative strategies that have steered studio investigations.

Project Outline

This research project explores the potential for studio practice to interrogate the role of visual tropes in constructing meaning within contemporary food imaging, as well as the

influence of digital technologies on its aesthetic evolution. This includes a redefining of photographic representation within this genre brought about by image manipulation and online networks. Through a dual-medium approach of painting and time-based media, this thesis presents a multi-textured exploration of contemporary food representation that builds on a previously well-documented historical trajectory of food imaging, by examining its growing visual presence online. It is important to note that while there is a rich field of research that examines historical food-based representation, this project is not a historical investigation. As such, the scope of historical references has been limited to specifically contextualise the contemporary focus of the project and the modern trajectory of food imaging, starting around the mid-twentieth century. Under this research criterion, I propose that the role of contemporary food imaging is being expanded by digital technologies, and now occupies a multifaceted presence online. This includes contributing to an aesthetic evolution that supports visually exclusive genres and prioritises the spectacular. Designing the unattainable through exaggeration and implausibility, digitally augmented representation has been identified as key to visualising contemporary food aspirations.

My studio research draws primarily from the critique of high-end food imaging. This style has been chosen as the focus for the research because it characterises a recent visual autonomy seen within contemporary food imaging. This includes the rise of visually exclusive food genres facilitated by digital technologies and communications, such as online platforms and digital photo editing. High-end food images are typically defined through meticulous plating, elegant visual aesthetics and exotic foods. Within this exegesis, high-end food imaging denotes the unattainable and the essence of cultural aspiration. It also represents a rising predilection for vicariously consuming

food and includes the elite sub-genre of online food porn. Food images typically deemed pornographic are solely created for visual pleasure. As such, they are heavily styled to exaggerate visual aesthetics and stimulate desires of intimacy and sensuality (Ibrahim, 2015a).

Along with a rise in boutique food aesthetics that exhibit exotic or extravagant dishes, this research highlights a growing emphasis on food imaging across fine art and popular cultural domains. This includes growing critical attention to the culture role of food through curated exhibitions, such as the exhibition *Harvest* hosted by the Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA), Brisbane, and having fine dining alongside experiencing art, as seen within the recently opened ‘Pharos’ wing at the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), Hobart. This suggests a blurring of creative boundaries and expanding cultural engagement with food, furthered by increased dissemination online through curated image feeds, such as Instagram.

As part of this analysis, I discuss the creative application of digital technologies, such as image editing and manipulation, which fabricate a sense of the spectacular and the uncanny. These are explored as a creative tool to facilitate a growing desire for innovative aesthetics, as well as expand visual parameters by augmenting reality to challenge perceptions around food. It is worth acknowledging the entwined psychological and sociological aspects of food to contemporary culture, when examining its visual representation. While these are not the central focus, ideas that have emerged from personal reflection filter throughout the exegesis to provide insight into the various ways that food and food imagery link to aspiration, described by way of a fetishistic desire for high-end sensorial experiences through perfection and control.

The studio research also examines the influence of digital manipulation on contemporary food imaging through visual strategies of re-contextualisation, hyper-realistic painting and looping video. These meticulous approaches have been adopted in order to develop a thorough grasp of how high-end dining experiences are corroborated and normalised through contemporary imaging. These are discussed through the application of exaggerated gesture, captured through painted digital styling and the cinemagraph. The cinemagraph merges isolated movement with still photography, incorporating notions of seamless looping to reflect a desire for preservation against the transient condition of the digital climate. Painted hyper-realism is discussed as a crucial system through which to engage the aesthetics of contemporary food imaging, capturing the pursuit of unattainable perfection and an observed public preference for audacious modes of image stylisation.

The re-contextualisation of images suggests a new mode of online originality, which is created through image appropriation and altering or re-mixing existing visual elements into a new state. The adaption of food imaging into the digital climate is explored through painted and digital manipulations. This includes enhancing the inherent attractiveness of food by amplifying particular aesthetic features, as well as fabricating an implausible pictorial space that draws the gaze through illusion and visual saturation.

A combination of analogue and digital mediums illuminates the multifaceted nature of contemporary representation, especially within the online space of photography, which is both interactive and diversifying. This includes a shifting relationship with digital images through varying degrees of collapsed and expanded critical distance and is

evidenced through a growing preference for novelty over plausibility. Overall, my research reveals that digital manipulation is crucial to the evolution of contemporary food media, as it enables rapid adaption into an online visual climate of instantaneity, presentism and spectacle. As such, food imaging has established itself as a visual currency of cultural exchange within the online visual economy.

Research Parameters

This research has been formulated to expand on the well-established discourse of historical food representation, using methods of pictorial analysis to unpack contemporary food imaging genres. As such, it draws from established knowledge around the symbolic and metaphoric application of food within historical artworks. However, this is only a small component of the project and is primarily applied to reevaluate recent compositional strategies in context to activating a range of visual responses. For example, even though the historical genre of vanitas has some association to food representation, it deals more broadly with unrelated allegorical themes of transience and mortality. Therefore vanitas, alongside other moral or political food affiliations, are not seen as the primary focus within this exegesis.

It is also important to establish that this investigation is not a critique of food representation within painting; instead paint is used as a research methodology to investigate contemporary food imaging culture. Given its contemporary focus, the analysis of food imagery is centred on photographic representation and its digital evolution, which is primarily online. Whilst the studio research is multi-layered and employs multiple digital methods, the application and exploration of these tools is not

used as either a substitute or supplement to painting. Instead, the studio work aims to reflect the way food imaging has become multifaceted by adapting and expanding its visual vocabulary in a digital climate.

Whilst painting and photography are key components of the methodology, this investigation is not based solely around the complexities that underpin their relationship. Throughout the exegesis, the nature of photography and the politics of the image are discussed against principles that are well established and commonly accepted within contemporary art discourse, including theorists such as William Mitchell, John Berger, Jonathan Crary and Michael Foucault.

Key Terms

Throughout the exegesis there are key terms employed that shape and define the research. Because of potential multiple connotations affiliated with such expressions, it is important to clarify the specifics of their application. Such terms include democratisation, authenticity, originality and aesthetics, as well as the shift between subjective and objective. The term democratisation is used in context to the interactive nature that underpins online engagement. Even though autonomy within these digital platforms can be argued as a simulacrum of democracy, it is applied to represent the freedoms of users to consume, create and contribute. In this context, the term authenticity is used to describe the way an act of originality online can be found through activities such as liking, commenting or re-posting. Authenticity is also used to describe the desirable visual tropes of sincerity and reassurance used within food

imaging, presumably employed in response to this new approach of digital based creativity and authorship.

The term aesthetics is used exclusively in reference to visual aesthetics. It does not imply a value judgment when used in the critique of images. For example it is not used to denote perceived beauty. Instead, the term aesthetics is used to denote the formal qualities of a composition and how various visual elements work in unison. Similarly, the terms subjective and objective are not intended to signify ethical or moral questioning, but are simply applied to describe the sometimes hidden degree of orchestration behind the photograph and a tendency for photographic information to be seen as factual or impartial. In context to food imagery, subjectivity is also used to describe a personalised reading of an image by accommodating personal desires. The term objective is also used to describe the application of studio methodologies to disrupt typical modes of perception and provide a new visual platform to gain a new perspective that helps reevaluate habitual viewing habits. For example, re-contextualising a photograph through an alternative medium, such as paint, has the potential to transform representation within the image into a personalised interpretation, thus helping to render layers of subjectivity and objectivity visible.

Exegesis Structure

This exegesis is divided into two Parts. Consisting of three chapters, the first Part defines the field of enquiry, alongside a broad contextual investigation. Observational

research and pictorial analysis, supported by Roland Barthes, Kenneth Bendiner, Norman Bryson and Hal Foster, examines the visual tropes and motivations behind a spectrum of food imaging genres, from historic representations through to social media. The second Part consists of four chapters and details studio-based methodologies.

In Chapter 1, I establish a field of enquiry by examining the trajectory of modern food imaging and analyse the visual tropes that make up these representations. The increasingly dominant roles of design and styling are examined as modes of creative intervention, which purposefully embellish the inherent characteristics of food. This is discussed against the still images of cookbooks and advertising. I also scrutinise the genre of food porn, as theorised by Anne McBride, Erin McDonnell, Signe Rousseau and Yasmin Ibrahim. Roland Barthes, John Berger, Susan Sontag and Jean Baudrillard inform the discussion on the persuasive power of food imaging through semiotics, consumerism and photographic theory. This research suggests a recent normalisation of visually exaggerated tropes and a subsequent pornification of food images.

In Chapter 2, I expand upon this visual analysis by examining how contemporary food imaging draws influences from visual art. This has been explored by constructing a food image archive, which is contextualised through a discussion of key artworks that illustrate important historical markers in food representation that have influenced in modern trajectory. These include artworks by Dutch still life painters Pieter de Ring and Joachim Beuckelaer and Post-Impressionistic work by Paul Cézanne. The image archive helped to establish four key image frames as part of the analysis: entertainment, authenticity, mastery and innovation. These frames are integral to identifying motivations behind contemporary food imaging and the unique traits of its ongoing

evolution. The term creative disruption, defined as strategically applying visual devices to elicit emotional responses from the viewer, is used to inform a discussion on the nature of increased public engagement with food imaging. The new digital space of such imaging is also addressed through online dissemination and social media.

Chapter 3 sets out a contextual framework that examines the expanding relationship between food and creative practice. The growing attention towards food is contextualised through an observed shift towards discerning consumption habits within Western society. The focus of this chapter is centred on the new ways food culture is experienced and engaged with through contemporary arts practice. This includes looking at curated art dinners hosted by the Tate Modern in London and are examined alongside exhibitions that accommodate a multiplicity of curated food-based events and media. Curated online image feeds recognise that visual aesthetics and online experiences are increasingly choreographed. This is examined against the idealistic world of fashion-based food imaging, including photographers Aleksandra Kingo, Maurizio Di Iorio and Jess Bonham. The digital sub-genre of the cinemagraph is also introduced to contextualise the expanding creative vocabulary of food through digital technologies. The decision to prioritise these contextual areas, instead of examining specific contemporary artists dealing with food-based luxuries, addresses the recent shifts within digital and creative popular culture, where food is explored as a facilitator of broader cultural engagement through exhibitions and experiential based media.

Part 2 outlines studio research methodologies and expands on critical observations established in the first Part of the exegesis. These final chapters have been contextualised and structured around the four image frameworks identified in Chapter

2. These frameworks provide key understandings into the motivations that underpin contemporary aspirations and reassurances within the digital climate.

Chapter 4 addresses the frame of entertainment as a methodology to explore image augmentation, digital manipulation and vicarious consumption. This is evidenced through a suite of works, which have been informed by digitally manipulated, appropriated online images, and then further re-contextualised through painted hyper-realism. Re-presentation as a form of visual disruption is discussed through the work of Richard Hamilton. Digital image editing is explored as a form of exaggerated styling to visualise food in novel ways. Here, the manneristic work of Giuseppe Arcimboldo addresses how styled exaggerations reveal a prioritisation of pictorial distortion over realistic representation. This is compared to contemporary food imaging, where a new visual climate is normalising the seductiveness of food porn, and abundance, plenitude and spectacle are prescribed as desirable traits.

Chapter 5 addresses the frame of authenticity as a means to question the role of authorship and originality within online environments. This is explored through a suite of paintings that directly re-contextualises high-end food images appropriated from the internet. As a creative methodology, appropriation is discussed through the work of Richard Prince, who uses the subjectiveness of photographic representation as a form of critique to explore authorship within social media and online interactions. Direct engagement and fabricated pictorial illusion is discussed against studio experimentation of painterly trace and digital perfection.

Chapter 6 addresses the frame of mastery as a space to explore ideas around perfectionism, control and the demonstration of skill within contemporary food imaging. This is discussed against the rituals and personal investment of hyper-realistic painting, which is presented as a means to retain personal autonomy within the digital climate. The pursuit of perfection is explored as a methodology that underpins both hyper-realistic painting and food imaging, and which inadvertently generates a sense of detachment.

Chapter 7 addresses the frame of innovation as a means to examine the changing aesthetics of online media and the elevation of the photograph through digital alterations. The concept of shifting perceptions around food by applying innovative and illusory visual strategies is explored through a series of cinemagraphs, and includes carefully choreographing varying degrees of stillness and movement through isolated looped animation. The visually eccentric presentations of high-end food imaging are discussed through a harnessing of the digital uncanny to visualise contemporary aspirations, which is created by disrupting time as well as fabricating implausible representations.

Chapter 8 summarises my research and reflects on the findings established from studio investigations. These findings suggest the rapid growth within food media is brought about by digital technologies, which are expanding visual platforms and, with them, the desire for contemporary food imaging. Image currency is also discussed as a key contemporary dimension to the digital adaption of food imaging, which has been explored by presenting digital and analogue mediums together. These contrasting modes of representation are used to highlight the manner in which the food imaging

economy is guided and expressed through various signifiers and exchanges of time. The exegesis concludes by speculating on new research directions and future studio endeavours, and proposes an ongoing need to develop new modes of creative-based disruption to critique how food is visually adapting to an expanding virtual space.

PART 1

Chapter 1: Food Imaging and Food Porn

Introduction

Within the domain of contemporary visual culture, the genre of food imaging is both popular and prolific. Promoted through online sites such as Instagram, Pinterest and Twitter, food imaging has become ubiquitous within popular media and commonplace in our daily visual interactions. Choreographed through styling and design, food imaging is a critical part of online visual communication and a window to explore the visual consumption habits of a diverse demographic of consumers. Colloquially dubbed *food porn*, the visual tropes of contemporary food imaging have been augmented in order to elicit new levels of engagement, activate our senses and arouse positive stimulation (Hoegg et al., 2007; Spence, 2010). Key visual devices include the use of props, subtle lighting manipulation and macro focus. Combinations of these strategies, in conjunction with compositional design, activate sensory triggers, such as exaggerated colour and texture, to create a desirable and alluring portrait of consumption. These interventions and orchestrations are now reflected in a majority of food images used both nationally and globally. Examples include the popular webpages, cookbooks and magazines of celebrity chefs like Donna Hay, Nigella Lawson, Gordon Ramsey and Jamie Oliver. Similarly, high-production food images are also easily found within online stock image houses that supply a broad selection of ready-to-use images for marketing, advertising, branding or news media.

This chapter establishes a field of enquiry by exploring the birth of modern food imaging, beginning around the mid-1800s, and following its history through to the rapid evolution of contemporary imaging practices. This includes an examination of the visual devices of design and styling that are commonly seen within these images, by analysing the pictorial elements that make up these photographs. This is discussed against the recent genre of food porn as well within other visual food media, such as cookbooks and advertising.

Field research has been conducted by applying pictorial analysis to identify common visual strategies employed in constructing popular food imagery. By analysing key visual tropes that are purposefully integrated into food imaging, my research explores how elements of semiotics, consumerism, photography and human nature have made food imaging popular, persuasive and indispensable. The evidence suggests that targeted visual devices choreographed into food images have normalised the use of visual exaggeration and the pornographic. This will be discussed by examining various modes of creative intervention; for example, purposefully embellishing the inherent characteristics of food, choreographing narrative with the use of props, as well as framing images through photographic tropes, such as macro focus and lighting.

Setting out this field of enquiry contributes to the discourse around the role of food imaging by exploring how a visual art based analysis can identify the unique elements that comprise its visual makeup. Observations that have underpinned this research have contributed to the development of a food image framework. This is structured into four key image frames and is discussed at length in the subsequent chapter. This framework has been critical in guiding my studio-based enquiries. Conclusions outlined from this

initial enquiry will introduce key areas that have underpinned this creative focus. These include a normalisation of exaggerated styling and the choreographing of visual aesthetics.

Theoretical Framework and Pictorial Analysis

The majority of the references that underpin the visual analysis of both the first and second chapters are supported through seminal theorists that advance the philosophical groundwork of visual art analysis. At the heart of this discussion is the role of photography in facilitating the visual tropes of food imaging. Maintaining an important standing within visual art critique, especially in the analysis of photographic practice, are theorists such as John Berger, Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard. Within this exegesis, they have been applied alongside theorists from contemporary food media studies, including Yasmin Ibrahim, Anna Lavis, Signe Rousseau and Erin McDonnell. The role of the image, how it is read and creates meaning, is an ongoing and relevant visual arts research problem, and its contribution to critical understanding of pictorial analysis and image meaning remain salient. Many of the concepts introduced within these first two chapters re-interrogate the past in order to bring forward novel perspectives in current imaging trends, and demonstrate that many questions relevant to contemporary food media form part of a longer historical dialogue (Bloomer-Davies, 2014).

The reflective and qualitative approach adopted for initial field research focuses on the construction and functionality of food images, rather than speculating on their possible impacts. Any image, food or otherwise, will attract a subjective reading from the

viewer. Therefore, visual analysis is primarily derived from critical interpretation; its inherent meaning remains elusive. Nonetheless, historic and contemporary visual art continues to be critically evaluated in this manner. Theorists decrypt and analyse paintings to enrich philosophical and sociological discussion within cultural practices. Whether sourced from popular media or historical fine art, images have always been used as a critical platform to explore, share and elucidate alternative means of knowledge transfer. Roland Barthes famously explores this approach within his short 1964 essay *Rhetoric of the Image*, where he applies the tools of semiotics to decode the subjective meanings and cultural connotations attached to an advertisement for the pasta brand Panzani. These systems continue to guide how meaning is constructed within food imaging today. Retrospectively, food images can also be seen as an historical archive capturing cultural markers. Utilising this approach offers an alternative reading on the functionality of popular food images, as well as providing a unique perspective from which to critique current food media.

The Development of Modern Food Imaging

The foundation of modern food imaging begins around the mid-1800s with still life photographers mimicking compositions from historical painting; for example, Dutch still life paintings of the seventeenth century. Photographers like Roger Fenton and John Thomson used familiar compositional devices, such as the table-top, to help draw out allegorical connotations associated with food (Starl, 2001). This can be seen in Thomson's 1873-74 albumen print *The Fruits of China*, where comestibles like fruit and wine suggest concepts such as fertility and self-indulgence (Figure 1). Deliberately aligning their work with compositional arrangements distinctive to Dutch painting

helped to elevate the genre of still life photography into the artistic domain. Moreover, it created a new space for food to be represented and perceived beyond its normal context.



Figure 1 - John Thomson, *The Fruits of China*, 1873-74

Images of this kind established a benchmark from which modern food imaging evolved, defining an important shift in how photography was not only about what could be seen within the world, but what was important (Bright, 2017).

From the late nineteenth century, cookbooks began to use photography to help contextualise recipes. Images often borrowed closely from artists such as Fenton and used the detail of photography to help visually describe texture, form and space. As with art, these images help to frame cookbooks as cultural markers of their time,

representing social conditions and attitudes. As Susan Bright describes in *Feast for the Eyes: The Story of Food Photography*, even early examples of food imaging, such as the seminal French cookbook *Le Livre de Cuisine* (1869) by chef Jules Gouffé, did not reflect what people were cooking at home. Rather, it dealt in gastronomic visions of sophistication and perfection (Bright, 2017).

Cookbooks: From Instruction to Inspiration

The early twentieth century saw a shift towards more instructional-based food media and a focus on how the domestic sciences could make life easier. Food imaging typically used within these manuals helped to demonstrate the values of neatness, hospitality and efficiency. It was not until the mid-1940s, with the emergence of new printing technology, that the trademark characteristics of modern food imaging begin to emerge. The rise of magazines and print advertising during this period prompted a significant shift in how food was presented and represented. Food media moved away from instructional themes towards leisure-based pursuits, which again began to highlight more affluent and gourmet cuisine (O'Neill, 2003). These were designed to be fashionable and showy images, opening a promised window of freedom that deliberately contrasted the hardships and rationing associated with wartime.

Themes such as entertainment and travel presented new strategies to engage viewing audiences beyond the fundamentals of basic cooking techniques, and encompassed feelings of optimism and plenty. Food media began to provide a glimpse of a previously unknown, exotic culinary lifestyle, where food was established as a symbol of cultural ambition. Instead of merely reflecting current habits and attitudes towards

food, the media and images began to fabricate them (Magee, 2007). Photographs around this time demonstrate a significant shift in how food images were composed, with designers recognising the importance of props, backgrounds and garnishing to help illustrate a complete aesthetic lifestyle. These popular devices are still used by celebrity chefs and culinary figures such as Jamie Oliver, whose websites and accompanying cookbooks use highly produced images to promote recognisable lifestyle brands.



Figure 2 - Margaret Fulton, *Italian Pizzeria*, 1968

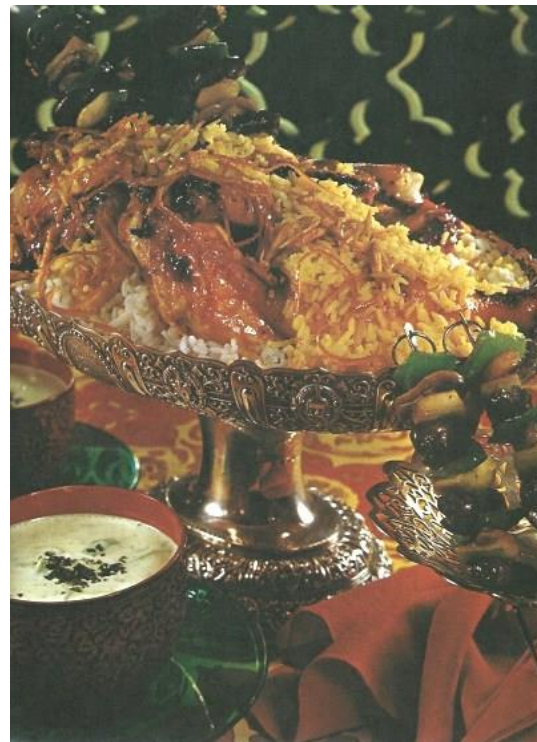


Figure 3 - Margaret Fulton, *Jewelled Rice with Vegetable Date Kebabs*, 1968

The classic images of the Australian *Margaret Fulton Cookbook* (1968) are among the first fully illustrated examples of food presented as cultural ambition (Bright, 2017). Fulton's exotic recipes are integrated between multiple full-page colour photographs. These inviting compositions jump between the rustic pleasures of an Italian restaurant, complete with hanging heads of garlic and vacuum-sealed mozzarella cheese, to a

Persian sanctum, warmly offering up an exotic dish of jewelled rice and glistening vegetable date kebabs (Figures 2 and 3). These miniature cultural journeys help the reader to escape with Fulton and share in her sixteen-year-long food adventure as Cookery Editor of *Women's Day*, as if sitting down to discuss the recipes over dinner with the author herself.¹

By offering up an exotic and realistic experience to the consumer, a visual space is created that blends fact and fantasy. Through their images, cookbooks offer the viewer potentiality and choice, which in turn enable the consumer to exercise a form of cultural identity definition (A. A. Berger, 2010; McCracken, 1988), and open a window into an otherwise alternative lifestyle experience (Holt-Fortin, 2012). As an object in its own right, the cookbook had shifted from being merely consulted to becoming an object that becomes consumed.²

More often than not, this adopted visual vocabulary is exaggerated and idealised (Holt-Fortin, 2012). Simple examples include adding a few droplets of glistening water to emphasise the freshness of an apple, or picturing a fully laden table of exotic dishes, piping hot and exquisitely presented. Despite being accessible and familiar, even from its early inception, food photography rarely depicted a realistic picture of what the

¹ An interesting comparison can also be made between the cookbook's 2010 republication, where a majority of the recipes remain, but with subtle changes; for example, changing the term 'pie' to 'tart' as well as the re-styling of the images to meet contemporary photographic food expectations.

² This is now truer than ever, as more practical cooking resources are obtained online. The tangible object of the cookbook has taken on a more collectable function, countering the intangible nature of online exchanges. As such, the role of the photo has also adopted a narrative function over that of mere illustration.

masses were actually eating (Barthes, 1972a), but, instead became a reflection of consumer relaxation, desire and escape (Bright, 2017).

Through exotic food presentation, the *Margaret Fulton Cookbook* demonstrates how the media uses representation to elevate food above a domestic chore towards a desirable pursuit that provides leisure and sophistication (Bright, 2017; Holt-Fortin, 2012). This new perspective has been consolidated further through the economic agendas of advertising, with the photographic image becoming indispensable in contextualising food as a new entertaining experience.

Food Advertising and Chef as Celebrity

Even from its early inception, food advertising has been underpinned by the convincing promises of aspiration and reassurance. The visual language of advertising draws heavily from the real, utilising a visual rhetoric that is easily recognisable and tantalisingly plausible (J. Berger, 1972; Horkheimer et al., 2002). For food advertising, the photograph provides a space where we are offered pleasure through purchase. Food is presented as freely available for consumption, and realistic enough to incite a sense of desire and yearning. However, the promise of pleasure the food provides seems to remain just out of reach. The durability of the image is reinforced by the relevance of the proposed new experience (J. Berger, 1972). This suggests that, for the consumer, what is on offer is the possibility of self-improvement through new culinary experiences. As with all advertising, the space between present and future is bridged by the desire of the consumer, who tries to reconcile the gap between who they are and who they would prefer to be.

From around the 1990s, the chef as celebrity or celebrity chef was born. As such, food media took on another dimension of cross-platform branded style marketing. Chefs, like Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson, have their own range of books, television shows and cookware, stimulating another surge in the recent saturation of food imaging. Jamie Oliver is a pertinent example of how brand-based marketing is commonplace within food media and directly impacts consumer activities.³ Key to Oliver's success has been the distinct visibility of his lifestyle-oriented brand, deliberately designed to capture a sense of sales-intimacy that allows audiences to gain pleasure by feeling they have a direct connection with Oliver himself (Ketchum, 2005).

Design and styling play a key role in constructing these intimate food-based experiences, by visualising and promoting key branded messages through the photographic image (Bright, 2017). As such, food styling has now become recognised as a legitimate profession. The photographic image has also been embraced within food media to effectively communicate to broad audiences. This suggests that current photographic imaging has taken on a function beyond its original illustrative purpose. By embracing aesthetics and constructed pictorial devices, just as Thomson elevated his subject beyond representation through historical association in the 1870s, contemporary food imaging has fashioned itself into cultural aspiration.

³ This includes a notable rise in the purchase of products aligned to the themes of trending television series such as *The Great British Bake-Off*, including the use of cross-promotional tools such as websites to broaden engagement (Rousseau, 2014). As part of this multifaceted media presence, Oliver has developed an inclusive and aspiring brand ethos that delicately straddles activism and commercial profit (Barnes, 2017). As such, Oliver has amassed a net worth of AUD \$273 million through an enterprise aimed at inspiring interest and enthusiasm in food, whilst promoting awareness towards nutrition, ethical buying and sustainability (Jamie Oliver Foundation, 2016).

However, an increase in the consumption of food media without any intention to cook, suggests that the photograph is also facilitating a purely vicarious experience. The common use of spectacular or idealised images implies that photographs have been orchestrated specifically to suggest visual consumption (O'Neill, 2003). This is reflected in the majority of contemporary food images, which increasingly employ aspirational ideals such as perfection, mastery and virtuosity. These traits can be contextualised through an examination of the image genre colloquially dubbed food porn.

Contemporary Food Imaging: Popular versus Porn

Food imaging now occupies an expansive domain that continues to blur the boundaries between the pedagogical and the voyeuristic. Its visual content increasingly emphasises aesthetics as a motivator for consumption and engagement (Stagi, 2013). As a result, consumers have developed a heightened awareness of the seductiveness of intimate, sensual and new experiences, including greater sensitivity towards objects of beauty (Ketchum, 2005). This shift in perception has been linked to an increase in the popular appetite for food voyeurism, further supported by the limitless potentiality of the internet (McDonnell, 2016). The visual aestheticisation of food, specifically photographed for pleasure, is commonly categorised as food porn. Augmented visual tropes in this genre elicit new levels of engagement by arousing positive sensory stimulation (Hoegg et al., 2007; Spence, 2010). More specifically, images are styled to elicit hidden desires of intimacy and sensuality (Ibrahim, 2015a; Ketchum, 2005; Stagi,

2013), while prioritising aspects of fantasy and unattainability (O'Neill, 2003; Rousseau, 2014).

The term food porn was coined to describe opulent interpretations of food (Cockburn, 1977), and was originally used to reflect an adopted exclusivity within culinary circles. The more common use of the term emerged in the 1980s, but this remains impossible to isolate exactly. Thanks, in part, to an explosion of websites and blogs dedicated to food in the twenty-first century, exposure to aesthetic food images has risen dramatically (McDonnell, 2016; Stagi, 2013), with 'gastronomy emerging as a cultural field' (Ray, 2007, p. 56). The consumption of aestheticised images has cemented food as a contemporary tool to define social belonging, demonstrate aspirational social standing and display cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). It is from this platform that food porn, mediated through spectacular imagery, continues to evolve, broaden its reach and reflect social and cultural relationships (Debord, 1994; Lavis, 2015).

Fantasy and indulgence

Food porn can be described as a site of excess, where superfluous information and over-signification are relentlessly thrust at the viewer. Like non-food pornography, food porn's overt nature is a fantasy of new possible experiences and augmented reality (Baudrillard, 1990). Voyeurism becomes an inadvertent form of ingestion, and like 'sex porn, we get enjoyment from watching what we ourselves presumably cannot do' (McBride, 2010, p. 38).

A particularly exquisite example is captured in an image accompanying a recipe for Chocolate-Dusted Pavlovas, posted on the website of Australian cooking authority Donna Hay (Figure 4). This image looks down upon three plump pavlovas topped with dark chocolate, pistachio crumbs and perfectly ripe raspberries, on what seems to be a flattened sheet of raw corrugated iron.



Figure 4 - Donna Hay, *Chocolate-Dusted Pavlovas*, 2016

The huge dollops of cream are excessive, and the blue, white, red, brown colour combination is theatrical and sumptuous. An underlying mood of hedonism is created through the suggestion of opulence and abundance. A randomly placed raspberry or stray dollop of cream invites the viewer to sneak a quick taste and sample the delights on offer. These visual embellishments of lighting, texture, and saturated colour

transcend food beyond an illustration of possible consumption, thereby activating the viewer's senses in new ways.

This is an intensely seductive and spectacular image, toying with feelings of fantasy and excess. There is an underlying mood of hedonism, amplified through the suggestion of opulence, frivolity and abundance. Also captured is a deep sense of anticipation, teasing the viewer's personal cravings. Overall the image is idealised, its intense allure magnified by a hallmark pornographic trait of the spectacular (Cruz, 2013). Similar to the masked agenda behind advertising, these images are not actually promoting food, but the suggestion of a luxurious lifestyle fed through self-indulgence and bursting with the arousal of longing and intimacy. In this context, the level of desire stimulated in the viewer now determines the value of food.

Sex, intimacy or desire

Scholars have argued that the pornification of food within television cooking shows is typically achieved through suggestive interactions with humans that mimic pornographic visual tropes of narrative absence and a looping of the 'money shot' (see Kaufman, 2005). This might include a slow build up to a climactic reveal coupled with repeated shots of a completed dish from various angles. In the case of still images, McDonnell (2016) explains that visual tropes and photographic modes capture the intimacy of food. She describes food porn as presenting food as both a sexual object and an object of sexual desire that is 'fundamentally about the accentuation of food as carnal pleasure' (McDonnell, 2016, p. 250). This is achieved through the sexualised materiality of food, where food can be seen variously as phallic and feminine. It is also

achieved through the suggestive presentation of food, where food constructions take on sexy characteristics, such as glistening, oozing or dripping, while exotic or rare foods elevate the mundane to eroticise the familiar. The photograph constructs a pornographic gaze by offering vicarious experiences. Such experiences rely on devices such as depth of field (drawing our focus through superfluous detail), zoom (providing an uncomfortably intimate proximity to food), orientation (offering an unfamiliar viewpoint to help reacquaint us with the familiar) and framing (teasing the viewer through the suggestion of what is just out of sight) (McDonnell, 2016, pp. 257-262).

McDonnell's work contributes significantly to explaining the attractiveness of food porn but, like Kaufman's, it relies heavily on suggestive terminology. This includes terms such as 'titillating, curvaceous and coquettish' (McDonnell, 2016, pp. 254, 251 and 261) or 'topless, tumescent and penetrate' (Kaufman, 2005, p. 60) to build up parallels to non-food pornography.⁴ As such, this encourages a focus on sexual metaphors in the interpretation of food porn. However, food's easy coupling with sex porn as a literal celebration of food as sex 'forcefully reveal[s] the limits of thinking in transgression' (Probyn, 1999, p. 220). In this context, pornography becomes a simplified 'rhetorical stick' (Ray, 2007) that is unable to capture more complex relationships between human desire and requisite nourishment. Using a visual art based analysis with observational research reveals that a majority of popular food images now employ at least one of the 'sexualised' tropes and one of the photographic frames

⁴ Another example is Nigella Lawson, who has embraced an undisguised sexualised approach within popular food media. Her on-screen personality has been defined by flirtatious quips and a focus on indulgence and intimacy. She has also described her own show as 'gastroporn' (see Hollows, 2003; Magee, 2007; Rousseau, 2012).

identified by McDonnell. This suggests that these imaging devices are not as closely linked to non-food pornography as McDonnell would argue.

Design and styling

Because the enticement of food imaging does not stem exclusively from the voyeuristic draw of sexual obsession, it is important to examine what makes food images so visually seductive. Food images certainly have the power to cultivate obsession and have been widely recognised to elicit fantasy through desire, intimacy and sensuality (McDonnell, 2016; Rousseau, 2014; Stagi, 2013); for example, the elaborate plating of exotic foods encourages the viewer to engage with interest and fascination. However, this is distinct from creative interventions that amplify food aesthetics specifically to be captured within the photographic frame. An important distinction can be made here that highlights how the devices of design and styling transform the viewer's glance into a gaze.

Styling can be described as manipulating food to accentuate aestheticised beauty, both overtly (through compositional design and the use of props) and covertly (nuanced manipulation such as by removing a minute crumb with tweezers or going through a dozen punnets of raspberries to select a perfect specimen). Such interventions present food as intensely desirable. The attractive traits of food - ripeness, freshness, roundness or plumpness - are purposefully exaggerated and prioritised through the styling process. This is initially performed through physically glazing, dressing, propping, pinning or embellishing the food before the camera, and then afterwards through post-production, where colour balance, contrast, saturation and brightness are adjusted or even digitally

airbrushed (see Young, 2012). These interventions, coupled with the selection and arrangement of objects, are applied in order to choreograph narrative and context into the composition. These devices direct the eye and build themes that hint at the presence of human interaction. Traces of crumbs or props, such as utensils, suggest that someone has just interacted with the food, or is just about to. A careful arrangement of these elements creates atmosphere and mood, which in turn facilitates a sense of authenticity (Bloomer-Davies, 2014).

Supporting compositional strategies of design and styling include key photographic devices of depth of field, framing, orientation and zoom (McDonnell, 2016), to which lighting can be added. These properties create a novel or atypical perspective of food, often omitting superfluous visual information to focus attention. However, my observations suggest that such techniques are not being exclusively used to conjure up an erotic response akin to the porn industry. Rather, they are being more commonly applied. Photographic angles include eye-level, typically used in combination with macro focus and a short depth of field, and looking down, which creates a sense of immediacy through a saturation of information. It also generates a personal invitation, as if sitting down to eat. In addition, lighting plays a key role in setting mood, typically through a diffused light that soothes whiter tones, or a warmer, romantic light that is suggestive of a darker, theatrical mood. These photographic frames can be described as intimate, but are not always erotic.

These descriptions reveal how design and styling are used to build an evocative space for the viewer to gaze at food. This contrasts with the analysis of visual devices previously attributed to food porn and begins the process of examining the images'

traits of desire and unattainability through a more complex lens that crosses discipline boundaries into art history and the visual arts.

Conclusion

The compositional influences of styling have become primary drivers within the image, with the object of food almost becoming secondary to how it is presented and represented through the photograph. In this context, the orchestration of food has become part of an augmented reality, where all facets of the image are either deliberately concealed or fashioned. This fusion of tropes and visual devices fabricates a convincing veneer that parades as reality and imperceptibly feeds the viewer's sense of perfection (Barthes, 1972a; Baudrillard, 1990). As such, food imaging clearly represents more than documentation; it frames cultural aspirations, attitudes and desires (Bright, 2017; Coward, 1985). Modifications made through styling enable food imaging to sit outside typical frames of reference. In artistic terms, these visual devices include the use of idealism, choreography, compositional framing, exaggeration, embellishment and iconography. The application of these strategies elevates modes of representation beyond standard documentation to create images that are naturally more engaging. Utilising creative devices characteristic to many artistic disciplines, such as painting, reveals how significance and meaning is constructed within contemporary food imaging as a means to more effectively communicate knowledge.

Key findings of this initial analysis include ascertaining how exaggeration has now become normalised in contemporary food imaging as well as how connotation remains a persuasive mechanism to engage the viewer. It also highlights the importance in

building a sense of intimacy within food imaging through visual tropes to draw the viewer's gaze. Additionally, this analysis reveals how all elements of food imaging are carefully orchestrated in order to deliberately choreograph aspects of mood, tone, appeal and visual aesthetics. These devices will be investigated further in Part 2, through a discussion of studio-based methodologies.

The next chapter explores how these creative visual devices have evolved from historical art movements. This process is discussed against four key image frames that have been identified within contemporary food imaging, as well as a more in-depth analysis around its online dissemination through the digital image and social media.

Chapter 2: Four Image Frameworks

Introduction

While there has been a recent rise in the use and production of food images, observations conducted during this enquiry suggest that methods of creative styling are not entirely new, but rather form part of an ongoing visual trajectory that can be traced through art history. This mirrors the influence of traditional still life painting on the birth of food photography around the mid-1800s (Starl, 2001) and suggests that food imaging continues to draw influences from art and use creative disruption to increase engagement and induce emotive responses from the viewer. Creative disruption is a term adopted by marketing that describes the strategic application of visual techniques that challenge audience expectations (Waldman, 2010). This term is specifically applied throughout this analysis to describe exaggerated presentation strategies within food images.⁵ By using this strategy, I aim to provide an understanding of visual art tropes and devices that leverage symbolic connotations within the digital age.

To establish how these devices have evolved, I conducted further observational research against an image archive constructed from photographs sourced from popular websites, blogs, social media platforms, magazines, stock image houses and cookbooks. This includes, but was not limited to, books by Matthew Evans and Jamie

⁵ The term creative disruption has been adopted specifically in relation to its application within marketing and popular image dissemination. Goodman describes similar unconventional operations online, through digital food activism. Goodman discusses this in the context of digital cultural politics (which is outside of the scope of this paper) and acknowledges that innovative modes of knowledge transfer are designed to get audiences to think differently about food and change behaviours (Goodman, 2018).

Oliver, *delicious* and *Donna Hay* magazines, as well as online sources including Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and Shutterstock. Images were selected from a wide range of popular media sources to ensure a representative sample of food imaging styles and trends. In this context, popular food images are defined as photographs that have been produced with a broad target audience in mind. The archive was compiled through a rigorous scoping campaign conducted over several weeks in 2017 and includes over 700 samples. Images were individually analysed and tagged with up to eight key words to reflect identified visual tropes, styling and photographic strategies. These include terms such as abstract, indulgent, simplistic, rustic, saturated and exotic. By consolidating these identifiers, I determined overarching trends.

From this archive, four broad stylistic frameworks were identified: entertainment, authenticity, mastery and innovation. Images examined within the archive rarely sat exclusively under one of these frameworks, but used a combination of varying degrees. This suggests that the four frameworks are linked, but retain distinctive visual characteristics. Applied tags and frameworks reveal the extensive use of creative styling across many types of food images, including the use of photographic devices previously described within the food porn genre. These include depth of field, cropping, macro focus and lighting. Within this context, design and stylisation suggests that contemporary food imaging, including through its recent digital evolution, is moving away from depicting food as sustenance to an approach that incorporates the use of historical iconography and symbolic metaphor.

This chapter examines how styling strategies used in contemporary food imaging reflect pictorial compositional devices, such as amplification, adornment and

arrangement. This will be established through an analysis of historical artworks that contextualise the identified key stylistic frameworks. This will be followed by an examination of the photograph as trace, including the role of photographic nostalgia, before the chapter concludes with a discussion of how the role of food imaging has expanded through online dissemination and social media interactions. Establishing historical connections contextualises how visual devices found within the image archive form part of a new, everyday visual dialogue that employs the suggestive metaphoric attributes of food in increasingly exaggerated terms.

Food Representation in Art History

The current fascination with representing and imaging food is certainly not a recent phenomenon. Within art history, food is considered a key visual signifier that is used symbolically by artists to help navigate the ambiguous moral terrain between prosperity and culture (Bryson, 1990; De Jongh, 1993). Most prominently seen within the Dutch still life paintings of the seventeenth century, ornate arrangements of culinary pleasures celebrated social and economic strength, while simultaneously exploring cultural identity (Bendiner, 2004). Food items, such as ripened grapes or freshly shucked oysters, became national symbols of strong trade, as well as revealing a desire for transitory pleasures over everyday pursuits (Bryson, 1990). Despite appearances, these paintings are not about food and were typically commissioned as aspirational depictions which portray personal and political power (Wansink et al., 2016). This type of visual celebration of food aesthetics is mirrored in popular food imaging, with both forms reflecting social and cultural desires rather than ‘mere’ food.

Dutch still life painting represents a major historical shift in the cultural and aesthetic role of food. Artists like Pieter de Ring use exotic displays of food to represent a sophisticated culture, driven to pursue wealth and intellectual superiority (De Jongh, 1993). This can be seen in his painting *Still Life with Golden Goblet*, 1640-1660 (Figure 5).



Figure 5 - Pieter de Ring, *Still Life with Golden Goblet*, 1640-1660

Known as *pronkstilleven*, or ostentatious still life, the display of indulgence in this presentation of rare foods alludes to a society that has achieved self-satisfaction through relaxation and leisure. De Ring's carefully composed work extols the rewards of

cultural sophistication. The meticulous commitment to detail, through realistic rendering, demonstrates an expanded appreciation of the symbolic potential of food, as well as its evolution from nourishment into a device for articulating identity (Doty, 2001).

Part of the attraction of *pronkstilleven* paintings is the excitement generated by the offer of new experiences. Such images often depict a combination of exotic foods carefully arranged on wooden tables, theatrically exhibited against dark backdrops. The use of the table-top itself is highly significant, representing a shallow, inviting stage set for a ritualistic cultural offering (Bryson, 1990). Similar to popular imagery, symbols of adornment and ornamentation (i.e. props) are common signifiers within these paintings. For example, in *Still Life with Golden Goblet* a silver plate stand denotes grandiose wealth, whereas the display of Chinese porcelain was chosen to celebrate Holland's role in global expansion (Bendiner, 2004).

The exotic comestibles exhibited within Dutch still life painting contrast with the market paintings of the same period, as demonstrated by Joachim Beuckelaer's *Kitchen Scene with Christ at Emmaus*, c. 1560-1565 (Figure 6). Within this work there is a similar display of sensitivity towards food; however, themes of luxury, indulgence and transience are replaced by a focus on materiality and tangibility.



Figure 6 - Joachim Beuckelaer, *Kitchen Scene with Christ at Emmaus*, c. 1560-1565

Concerns around prosperity and culture appear grounded through an emphasis on worldliness and earthly rituals. Compared with the theatrical still life compositions, market paintings of the same era are more realistic and optimistic in attitude. Humble truths cut through the fantasies of exotic and transitory pleasures, deliberately presenting a contrast to the pretence of the wealthy social classes. In the market painting genre, the mood suggests a celebration of life with all its toils and rewards, with food symbolising nourishment and a genuinely enriching life experience (Bendiner, 2004).

Despite adopting contrasting positions on food's moral role, *Still Life with Golden Goblet* and *Kitchen Scene with Christ at Emmaus* draw the viewer's gaze by offering an intimate space of contemplation. As typical examples of the genres of Dutch still

life and market paintings, both artworks are similar in composition. Within each work, the choreographed arrangement of food is complex and plentiful; the eye is drawn in through an artistic sensitivity and aesthetic harmony. Both artists explore notions of aspiration and reassurance; however, each work focuses on different qualities of desire. Whereas De Ring's painting captures a sense of novelty and frivolity through the selection of luxury items and theatrical lighting, Beuckelaer's work appears sincere and honest in its robust display of food. Like those in my image archive, these works demonstrate that a complex range of human desires can be activated through the creative interpretation of food. Methods of creative disruption used by de Ring and Beuckelaer include strategies of pictorial framing and orientation as well as compositional arrangement. Coupled with painterly embellishments of texture, colour saturation and light, each work depicts food as more than a comestible and appeals to the viewer's senses in new ways.

These two examples illustrate that the use of creative disruption through representation transforms food from object into metaphor. This demonstrates that the imaging of food has long been, and remains, an important site through which to study changing cultural norms and practices. The use of food as metaphor also suggests that abstract ideas can be explored through realistic representational strategies (De Jongh, 1993). Within de Ring's painting, the lobster is a signifier for the prosperity of earth's natural resources, while simultaneously cautioning against the corruption of gluttony. Metaphors remain similarly plentiful in popular food imaging. Simply put, it is often the embellishment of aesthetics that evokes intimacy and draws the gaze, and it is from this connection that metaphoric and symbolic meanings are activated. Seemingly realistic

representation becomes a rhetorical tool of persuasion, where the seduction of pleasure is activated through the apparent presentation of ‘truth’ (Grootenboer, 2005).

Two centuries after these Dutch still life paintings, the painterly interpretation of food fully embraced creative disruption. For example, within Post-Impressionistic painting, such as Paul Cézanne’s *Still Life with Jar, Cup, and Apples*, c. 1877 (Figure 7), apples become part of a larger decorative framework, independent of any direct connection to reality. Cézanne ritually used fruit to interrogate the construction of pictorial space and the role of illusionism, specifically in regard to the growing impact of photography on representation.

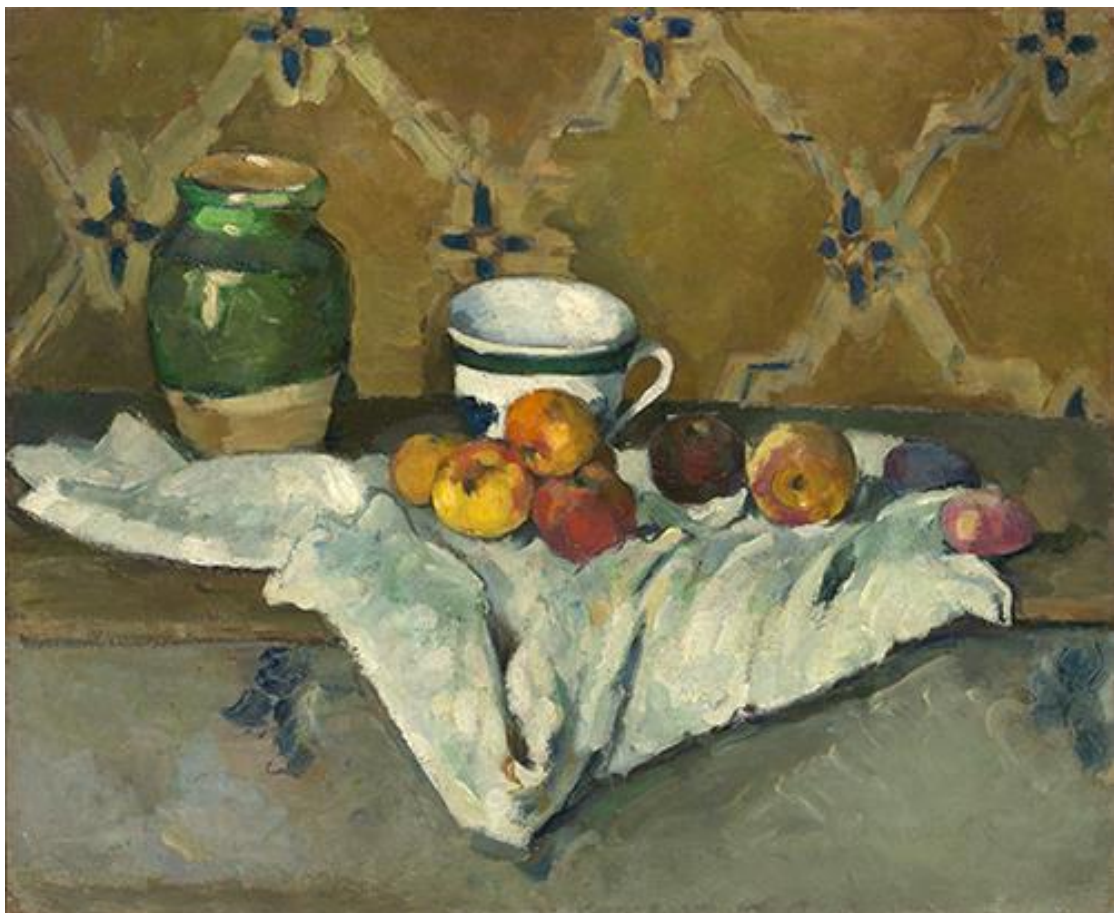


Figure 7 - Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Jar, Cup, and Apples*, c. 1877

In this context, fruit allowed both artist and viewer to revel in the formal elements of visual aesthetics. Cézanne was interested in representing the true nature of sight, and believed that the camera had shifted understandings of how we see from a single one-point perspective (as developed through the Renaissance) to one that was far more complex and included the representation of both time and space (Kern, 1983). Through the arrangement of objects and the treatment of paint, Cézanne reveals that exaggeration, creative disruption and subjective rendering can unearth new ways of seeing. For Cézanne, representing space and light through the simplicity and completeness of form corresponded with sensation.

These historical examples demonstrate that food can be styled through creative disruption to embellish culturally constructed norms. Such embellishments also reposition food as a pure aesthetic experience, moving it beyond a material object into something that can be read as metaphor (Bendiner, 2004). Creatively disruptive devices such as these are also part of popular food imaging, where styling and design transform food images into sensory experiences. Clear connections can be seen between historical paintings and styled popular food imaging, where food becomes transformed through embellished aesthetics and creative disruption. The purpose of this transformation is to draw the gaze, incite spectacle and capture the imagination. In this context, devices previously identified as pornographic can also be defined as artistic translations; they underscore why contemporary food images are considered to be beyond documentary. This transformation, where exaggerated visual tropes can be observed, also reflects a growing normalisation of food's pornification (Rousseau, 2012). This is demonstrated via each of the four identified frameworks, through which specific creative tropes emphasise different aspects of desire.

Stylistic frameworks

Innovation through abstract appeal

The desires targeted within popular food imaging are drawn from a spectrum of subtle emotional triggers. The first identified key stylistic framework is *innovation*. Innovation capitalises on the appeal of the unusual, where images display visually arousing traits of uniqueness and exclusivity. Under this frame, we would expect to see a variety of creative forms, textures, shapes and colours, as illustrated in Figure 8. Some of these are recognisable; others are deliberately transformed to challenge expectations. In this category, food elements are vaguely recognisable, but also appear abstract in nature. This is seen in the strangeness of the soup and the granulated part of the garnish, which oscillate between being familiar, unusual, appealing and abject (Korsmeyer, 2002).



Figure 8 - Food image under the frame of *Innovation*

Underpinning this frame, like the Dutch still life, is the lure of the exotic. The orchestrated positioning of food dabbles in unfamiliar culinary territory. Images within this framework do not necessarily reflect everyday experience and, like the voyeuristic pleasure derived from food porn, any attempt at replication is generally accepted as unnecessary (McBride, 2010). The space between what is genuine and implausible is blurred; the image no longer serves our needs, only our wants (Rousseau, 2014). Desire and the exotic become choreographed tropes. In Figure 8, creative disruption is evidenced through the use of the rich black void. The void creates a space for the white dish to glow, visually activating the colour and texture combinations. This use of contrast also helps to amplify a sense of drama within the image.

Entertainment and the visual feast

Iconography that refers to the allure of the exotic and desire can also be found within the stylistic framework of *entertainment*. In this framework, similar levels of indulgence are found, but with a focus on quantity. Entertainment-based images often depict large amounts of food that suggests a lifestyle of abundance and excess. Styling within this framework promotes themes of celebration, hosting and plenitude, which are also seen within historical exemplars. Images within this frame frequently depict food bursting from the edges of the image as an endless cornucopia (Figure 9). This vast spread of food-based indulgence can be seen as asserting notions of greed as well as feeding a sense of guilty pleasure. Food variety also plays a role within this representation and, as with the Dutch market paintings, we are invited to feel reassured by the bountiful prospect of nutrition and nourishment.

Entertainment food images often include a surplus of visual detail. In Figure 9, the image appears intimate; it draws our gaze because it is focused through the photograph's short depth of field. At the same time, saturated colour and glistening light suggests a relaxed atmosphere and leisure. This example alludes to a range of intimate social engagements and a personally projected narrative that could include parties, courting and seduction. The attraction of the entertainment framework lies in viewing from the perspective of a guest, where the 'host' offers food as an expression of affection through giving. In this context, food becomes symbolic of a 'willing and enjoyable participation [in] servicing other people' (Coward, 1985, p. 103), allowing the viewer to gain a sense of comfort and participation from the image.



Figure 9 - Food image under the frame of *Entertainment*

Mastery and exhibiting talent

The stylistic framework of *mastery* provides a space where we admire control, exhibited through expert culinary skill. Typical visual tropes include perfection and expertise, as well as personal investment through time and labour. Visual uncertainty around a food item can be negated by feelings of reassurance derived from a demonstration of knowledge over the subject (Foster, 1993). An example of the mastery image frame can be seen in a faultlessly constructed and impeccability displayed cake (Figure 10). The image is heavily styled - from the soothing tonal harmony of blues, the careful positioning of nuts, seed and berries, through to the slice of cake postured at a jaunty angle. The composition is clean, balanced and geometric, allowing this perishable food to appear timeless.

The visual appeal of this image is achieved through absolute accuracy and precision, which demands our attention. Within this frame, delight stems from giving over to the expert and conceding that the perfection is unattainable. This high level of image mediation enables plain food to appear more interesting. In artistic terms, this is reflected through skill, as with de Ring's seductive rendering of light refracted from each grape (Figure 5). Familiar food is cast in a new light, which reacquaints us with the overlooked beauty of the immediate (Bryson, 1990; McDonnell, 2016). The controlled styling, evidenced by the absence of a single crumb, becomes, in a parallel to sex pornography, the 'culinary equivalent of the removal of unsightly hairs' (Coward, 1985, p. 104), sustaining the fantasy of unattainable perfection.



Figure 10 - Food image under the frame of *Mastery*

Authenticity and rustic charm

The search for authenticity is an important driver in popular culture, and food is no exception (Guixé et al., 2013). This can be seen in the renaissance of artisanal food products presented as an alternative to the perceived shallowness of large brand corporations (Miele et al., 2002). It seems sincerity can now be found in homemade, organic or natural products. Food imaging fashions also follow this trajectory, adopting a rustic aesthetic to make the content appear more genuine and realistic (Wilson, 2015). The final key frame of *authenticity* appeals to the desires of a viewer who is not scared

to get their virtual hands dirty. Images within this style typically depict pastoral simplicity through food preparation and humble fare (Figure 11). A comforting intimacy is created through a focus on homely props, such as checked napkins, enamel cutlery and a raw wooden table-top. The sense of cordiality evinced through these everyday items suggests solid ethics and functionality.



Figure 11 - Food image under the frame of *Authenticity*

This is an accessible image with visual tropes implying a traditional and nurturing experience that has been achieved through a perceived sense of honesty and personal reassurance. The table-top is used and worn and the patina of the cutlery is dull and tarnished. Patina is a visual trope that reflects human engagement, highlighting an intimate symbolic relationship between food and real people (Doty, 2001). Around the sixteenth century, patina was valued as a symbolic property of consumer goods. Signs of age and use authenticated an object's status, implying that their owners were

established and had enjoyed generations of discretionary wealth (McCracken, 1988). Within the stylistic frame of authenticity, patina is deliberately used to signify cultural depth and longevity. In this context, a few crumbs or a crude wooden table become emotional registers that draw attention to grounded values that sit outside fashion. A checked napkin or whole ingredients suggest an unadulterated relationship between the food, image creator and viewer. These traits also open up a dialogue that evokes narrative, place and time.

Photographic Image as Trace

Visualising a sense of time is often defined through a sense of lost connection or nostalgia. This can be described as a romantic relationship to one's own fantasy (Boym, 2001), and in the context of food imaging is suggested by creating images that appear idealised and romantic. Props and backdrops are used as metaphorical triggers to substantiate the act of reminiscing. Nostalgia can also be described as a longing for a different time, not based on historical fact, but rather a private mythology. In this sense, nostalgic visual triggers evoke the power of memory while fictionally fabricating a new ideal. As with many of the other visual devices described here, nostalgia is not a modern trope, but can be linked to the Romantic artists of the early nineteenth century. Painters such as Caspar David Friedrich (*Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818) and John Williams Waterhouse (*The Lady of Shalott*, 1888) deliberately used emotive narratives to evoke heightened aesthetic responses, through the free handling of paint, impasto brush-marks and dramatic lighting. Such artworks showed great reverence for the past, often through a subjective and glamorised reading of historical events that encouraged the viewer to re-evaluate the present (Schneider, 2007).



Figure 12 - Food image that displays *Nostalgia*

Contemporary food stylists use similar devices to frame narrative-based scenes as sentimental and picturesque (Figure 12). The universal familiarity of this type of styling presents the scene as comforting and cosy, as if opening a portal into the past. The dramatic warm glowing tones suggest an idealised Christmas Eve, with the short depth of focus setting a tone of romantic wistfulness. As such, the appeal of the food is almost surpassed by the homeliness of the image and the offer of an ideal Christmas. Ambient levels of nostalgic value compensate for any narrative gaps within the image. In this sense, nostalgia builds a sense of authenticity within the image. As a powerful trope within contemporary food imaging, nostalgia has facilitated and legitimised the appropriation of visual devices and compositional strategies from historical sources.

Every photograph can be viewed as a window to the past, opening a portal to a different time and space. Photography is both a 'system of representation and a social phenomenon' (Batchen, 1997, p. 4) and, as such, functions as a mode of cultural production that is contingent on the context that it finds within itself. Throughout digital culture this context is not neutral, nor is it static. Images created within this mode are therefore malleable in their subjective reading. A photograph, digital or otherwise, is unable to be seen as reflecting reality. Presented on a screen with limited colour and tonal variation, restricted scale and depth of field, a photograph is unrestrained from the parameters that limit human vision (L. Manovich, 1994). The unlimited possibilities, freedom from reality and subjective frame of reference is exactly the space where food imaging thrives and the reason it has become so popular.

The idea that the photograph has a universal language but speaks personally to the viewer (J. Berger, 2001) suggests that, as well as drawing from compositional traits pioneered by Dutch still life artists, popular food imaging may also share underlying motivations and characteristics. Both genres sustain multiple meanings that simultaneously mask and reveal ideas, depending on personal interpretation (Grootenboer, 2005). An ongoing desire to decode and understand images is symbolic of society's reliance on images, both past and present, to make meaning, to communicate and offer new understandings of cultural appreciation. Even though the photographic image still pertains to a trace of reality, a relic of past events, it simultaneously offers a framework to consider the present through participation (Sontag, 1977). Thus, a photographic image that is presented, copied, liked and re-posted on websites and digital platforms alludes to this trace, but also offers an

alternative narrative, one that is a complex system of signs, signifiers, desires, contexts and currencies (Davis, 1995; Mitchell, 1992).

Digital Food Engagement and Dissemination

Diversification within online media, as well as an increase in consumer interest, has produced a proliferation of food images, which is in line with other types of contemporary digital imaging.⁶ The act of instantaneous posting and publishing through digital means has not only increased audience engagement and volume, but also enabled more distinctive approaches to the presentation and representations of the subject. As such, digital images have become an important online social currency that facilitates exchange and communication (Ibrahim, 2015a). Food is now embedded within this image economy where the public can digitally fabricate, engage and consume. The increasing volume of engagement has established the practice of contemporary food imaging ‘as a cultural artefact’ (Ibrahim, 2015a, p. 3). In this context, imaging becomes a dominant broker within visual culture, not simply a representation of everyday life, but a product that is embedded within its functionality (Lister et al., 2001; Mirzoeff, 1999) and commonly read as an extension of the physical world (Ibrahim, 2015b).

Through this active involvement, the participant negotiates broader social relations against themselves, blurring the boundaries between the private and public realms

⁶ This can be evidenced by the number of sub-genres of contemporary imaging suffixed with ‘porn’, such as ruin-porn and pet-porn.

(Ibrahim, 2015b). Both historic and modern food images have often done the same, opening a visual window that merges these two domains, creating an intimate yet simultaneously accessible image. Food imaging, social media and online image repositories are suitable allies, where private experiences can be shared publicly and public experiences are consumed more privately (Bright, 2017). Food itself reflects this dichotomy, its physical appeal is determined by personal taste, yet it is often consumed in ritualised social situations. These dissolving boundaries create a virtual space where food imaging can flourish, its universal context and visual vocabulary readily accepted within the public domain as typically inoffensive, non-political and innocuous.

Truly unique to food imaging today is its unprecedented dissemination, through harnessing online platforms to maximise distribution and reach (Rousseau, 2012). The quantity of food images now available through multiple facets of digital media becomes symbolic of how we engage and, more importantly, use digital images within online social interactions (Highfield et al., 2016). This digital flexibility permits food image exchange to extend social-based food customs to allow users to create meaning, define identity, find personal relevance and build connections (Ibrahim, 2015a).

These online interactions include professional chefs and amateur foodies posting images online, participating in a new performative style engagement that is interactive. The blending of professional and user-generated content online, including both original and recycled contributions, has undoubtedly popularised the habitual use of food imaging. This has seen a democratisation of imaging practices by encouraging participation and making personal contributions. As such, food imaging is now more

broadly recognised as an important part of the image-based cultural gift economy (Bright, 2017; Ibrahim, 2015a).

Sites like YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest allow viewers to resourcefully manage an increasing volume of content, the popularity of each site representative of a desire to easily find personally relevant content. These catalogued repositories enable a style of self-curated engagement, where visual information and narrative become a ‘digital landscape’ that allows users to participate unhindered within a new ‘sense of time and space’ (Ibrahim, 2015b, p. 54). This has subsequently provided broader audiences with ever-greater access to more extravagant and high-end food aesthetics.

High-end Aesthetics

A quick survey of social media platforms throws up a barrage of exquisitely plated dishes from a seemingly limitless number of artistically gifted chefs, each image feed striving for appraisal in the form of likes, followers and comments. Handles such as *GastroArt* and *Foodstarz_official* are carefully curated, reposting images that exclusively prioritise seductive visual aesthetics (Figures 13 and 14). All images display high levels of creativity, excellence and uniqueness, where exaggerated visual tropes and highly produced images begin to appear commonplace.

The spectacle of exquisite food ornamentation within these images, as well as the design of the online platforms to exclusively facilitate rapid image consumption, reframes each posted photo as exclusively pictorial. As such, any natural facets of the food being represented become obscured through perfection and a focus on luxury

(Barthes, 1977). There is no experience available outside of the photographic frame, yet the visual substitute is not necessarily unsatisfying; the exotic promise of each dish instead enables design, artistic flair and creativity to become a visually digestible substitute.

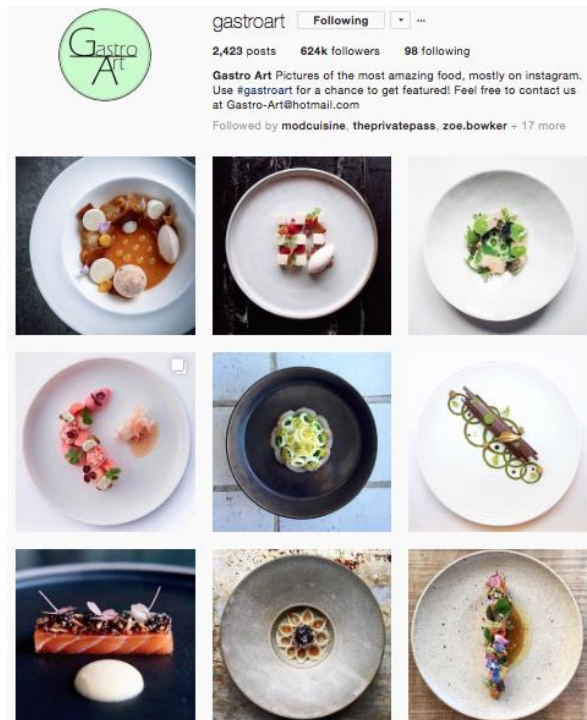


Figure 13 - *GastroArt*, Instagram feed, 2018

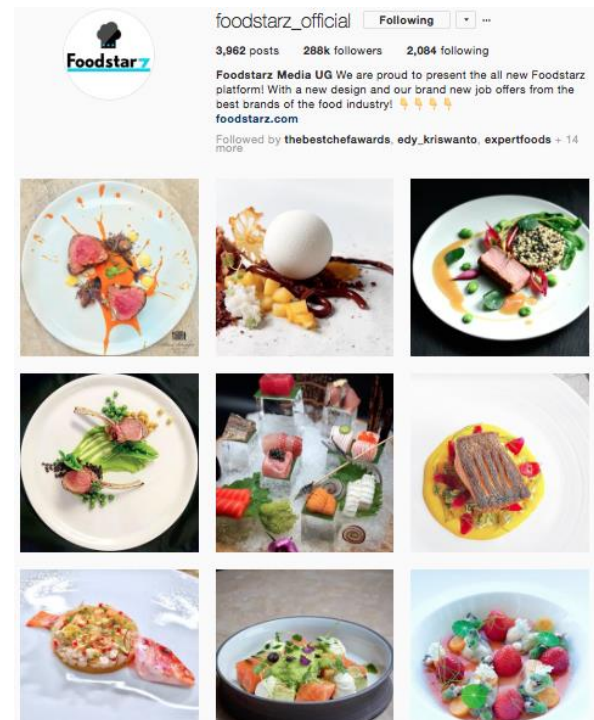


Figure 14 - *FoodStarz*, Instagram feed, 2018

The enormous popularity of these image-based social media feeds,⁷ signifies that the viewer is a willing voyeur. In particular, the admiration shown towards high-end food images, through online comments and likes, becomes a valid social statement. This suggests a preference for food images that are highly styled and designed, as well as an

⁷ For example, *GastroArt* has 617,000 followers and *Foodstarz_official* has 288,000 followers (viewed 22 April 2018). It is also worth noting that neither handle is directly affiliated with a particular chef or restaurant but functions independently as a curated image feed.

acceptance of food images that are created for visual entertainment purposes only. As such, high-end food images become a broader cultural metaphor and represent how popular culture is driven by visual aesthetics.

By augmenting appearance and presentation, high-end food images offer an aspirational space that visually transcends the monotony of personal routine. Typically, the sense of elitism within high-end food images does not incite criticism, but instead provides a space of momentary escape. Despite many contemporary food images focusing on provocative displays, they rarely create a feeling of disorientation. Alternatively, the viewer can feel inspired or empowered, brought about by seeing a display of creative originality. This sense of reassurance is not necessarily derived from the easy recognition of particular food items, but from seeing the successful dominance over its natural state (Foster, 1993).

Conclusion

This chapter establishes direct links between key historical painting movements and popular food imaging by identifying visual tropes and pictorial devices that are reflected across both genres. From these links, it can be concluded that contemporary food imaging - like the historical examples of de Ring, Beuckelaer and Cézanne - uses design and styling to create a sense of aspiration or reassurance. This is further reinforced by observations and exploration of the underlying motives behind the four image frameworks of entertainment, authenticity, mastery and innovation, which employ similar devices to build a sense of intimacy. These devices build a range of augmented visual tropes, including indulgence, desire, fantasy and sensuality. This

suggests that creative disruption is an increasingly critical player within food imaging, which aims to draw the gaze and activate a range of desire-based triggers. This analysis identifies a gap in the critique of contemporary food imaging, specifically in decoding creative devices employed in the creation of the images, as well as the cultural role of the representation within a longer historical lineage. The defining visual styles of the four image frameworks also provide scope to examine attributes of contemporary and high-end food imaging that are unique to its digital evolution.

Of course, this growth is driven as a consequence of online dissemination and a subsequent increase in visual consumption. The digital democratisation of food imaging has established an environment where exhibiting creativity has taken centre stage. This has also increased a sense of expectation, with a demand for heavily designed images with high production values. Important here is the observation that food imaging is transitioning away from primarily contextualising written content, such as a blog or recipe, towards a self-sustaining genre that has been produced exclusively for visual consumption. This has subsequently seen a rise in the use of image appropriation. Firstly, where food imaging unashamedly uses exaggerated artistic devices to increase appeal, and secondly, through social media feeds that are built from image recycling.

All of these unique traits can be observed in the recent rise in popularity of high-end food imaging. Distributed by online platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest, high-end food imaging visualises an important blurring of creative boundaries between art, food and culture. It also typifies how the exaggerated or abstract presentation of food does not decrease engagement, but instead increases acclaim. High-end food imaging

is the visual epitome of cultural aspiration, capturing the importance of an ongoing social search for authenticity through new experiences (Guixé et al., 2013). It seems a sense of the unattainable within high-end food imaging is central to its visual appeal, becoming a new strand of food porn distributed for the class conscious.

This emerging slippage between food and art will be examined within the next chapter. This will include analysis of how food is increasingly a topical domain for artistic critique, but also a space for creative expression through curated exhibitions and socially engaged art dinners. The increasing influence of digital technologies will also be discussed against the sub-genres of fashion-based food imaging and the cinemagraph.

Chapter 3: Curating Food and Fashion Imaging

Introduction

Recently, a renewed creative focus on the critique of food has included expanding its cultural role. Within this new space of food engagement and critique, the role of food imaging in coding and decoding consumption habits and relationships is shifting towards food within society. This subtle and almost indistinguishable crossover is indicative of a new visual dialogue between mediums, media and demographics that reflects an expanding aesthetic attention around food imaging and its role in bridging popular and fine art practices.

Chapter 3 builds on this context through an examination of the curated exhibition *Harvest* at the GOMA, Brisbane, to argue that food representation and visual engagement remain a topical focus for contemporary creative practice. It will also broaden the discussion around how food is being used to facilitate greater cultural engagement with the arts; for example, through gallery events such as curated art dinners. The contemporary sub-genres of fashion-based food imaging and the cinemagraph are also discussed, to explore how digital technologies have provided a flexible environment for creative expression. The chapter concludes by identifying a gap within the current critique of contemporary food imaging within creative research. This includes adopting a multiple medium based approach to best produce an original contribution, especially within a digitally expanding contextual field. More specifically, key terms are introduced, which span the varying facets of food imaging

that have informed the focus for studio-based research. These include curation, creative disruption, appropriation and multimedia.

The Food / Art Collaboration

Interactive engagement and increased attention around food within popular culture has generated a renewed focus by artists, curators and galleries on examining the role of food media as a critical space of inquiry. As a result, more curated exhibitions within private, state and council-run gallery spaces are considering the key function of food within the broader fabric of contemporary social activities. Nationally, this includes the major 2016 exhibition *Cornucopia*, hosted by Shepparton Art Museum (SAM), Shepparton, Victoria, as well as the 2017 exhibitions, *Kitchen-Studio* at May Space, Sydney, and *Imagining Food: Art, Aesthetics and Design* at the Academy Gallery, University of Tasmania, Launceston. A comprehensive spectrum of inquiries has been covered within these exhibitions and events, including creative investigations that examine political, environmental and economic ties to food. These larger topics underpin more specific enquiries into the consumption and manufacture of food. However, it can also be observed that larger gallery institutions such as GOMA, Brisbane, the AGNSW, Sydney, and the Tate Modern, London, are expanding the reach, application and public engagement with their exhibitions through choreographed culture and food-based experiences, such as curated art dinners. So, not only is food being addressed thematically, but it also becomes an interactive extension of the gallery and cultural experience. This adoption of food under the banner of high-end cultural engagement suggests that critiquing, creating and consuming food, either through art or in life, is a recognised domain for creative expression.

In this context, a blurring of boundaries between curator, artist, chef, designer and critic occurs. The interactive nature of these food-based events and exhibitions also mirrors the interactive engagement seen within social media, where the non-passive viewer can participate beyond normative frames. These shifting relationships, between the public, private and creative realms, demonstrate that the broad cultural application of food and food imaging is an important and growing field for creative research. Having gallery institutions align the merits of food and art-based experiences also encourages the viewer to engage beyond traditional means. This enables the creation of a new multidimensional encounter that casts food and art within a new collaborative context.

Curating Visual Engagement

Curated exhibitions

Within the gallery context, curators carefully construct narrative by designing an exhibition around a particular theme. This can be seen in the 2015 food-based exhibition *Harvest*, curated by Assistant Curator of International Contemporary Art, Ellie Buttrose for GOMA, Brisbane. In this exhibition Buttrose collaborated with Australian Cinémathèque's Associate Curator, Rosie Hays to develop a broad-reaching and multi-layered visitor experience by employing a range of interactive content. This included a combination of traditional arts based exhibits alongside a selection of movies, documentaries, panel discussions, activities and a traditional printed catalogue. This publication interweaves exhibition content with essays, recipes and photographed dishes from renowned international and Australian chefs.

Harvest drew predominantly from GOMA's permanent collection and showcased over one hundred artworks. The exhibition was deliberately curated to explore the more traditional concepts of food representation; for example, those found within European art from the seventeenth century onwards. It also introduced more overlooked contemporary perspectives around food and culture relationships explored by Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander artists. The exhibition allowed for a more speculative critique around food production, with artworks introducing ideas of alternative agricultural and urban development practices (Buttrose, 2014).

Within the *Harvest* publication, equal space is dedicated to visual art, recipes and the cinema program. As a result, an image used to complement a recipe of *Thangool Squab* by chef Josh Lopez (photographed by Shane Holzberger) is seen parallel to Alexander Coosemans' *Still Life*, painted c.1650 (Figures 15 and 16). The decision to present food images and artworks democratically within the catalogue reflects a broader shift in attitudes. The images that contextualise the recipe section also have high production values and draw from powerful tropes discussed in Chapter 2, including props, lighting, highly considered plating and compositional orchestration. In this context, the reproductions of artworks and food images function unanimously within the curatorial thread and present the viewer with a new space in which to explore the metaphoric role of food.



Figure 15 - Alexander Coosemans, *Still Life*, c. 1650



Figure 16 - Josh Lopez, *Thangool Squab* (photographed by Shane Holzberger), 2015

Harvest provides a clear example of the contemporary discourse evolving between art and food and how these two domains are seen as interchangeable. Similar to popular food imaging online, *Harvest* illuminates how cultural experiences are becoming more curated, accommodating a wider gamut of popular interests to maximise reach and secure high engagement. Along with *Harvest*, exhibitions are now being designed to be ‘insta-friendly’, so as not to be ignored by the changing face of popular engagement, which is dominated by online social interactions (Budge et al., 2018). It also reflects a desire for curated experiences, even in food media, where experts are employed to elevate familiar ideas to new levels of engagement. Here, a multiplicity of events and interactions accommodates non-passive viewers, allowing for a more personalised style of entertainment.

Curated art dinners

The expanding relationship between fine art and food can also be seen within the recent popularity of curated art dinners. Typically hosted as an accompaniment to an exhibition, these add another sensory layer to the visitor experience. Of course, the gallery café or restaurant has long been a staple feature of larger cultural institutions, not to mention a growing addition to most regional galleries. However, a growing collaboration between chef and curator can be seen as representing the expanding role of food in bridging art and culture. Two recent examples were hosted in 2017 by the Tate Britain, in London. The first event comprised a special guided tour for guests of the exhibition *Impressionists in London*, soaking up late-nineteenth-century works by Monet and Tissot.⁸ This was then followed by a gourmet dinner that encapsulated the essence of French cuisine, accompanied by a selection of French wine. The second example is a specialised three-course menu created by the *Rex Whistler Restaurant*, inspired by David Hockney.⁹ The dinner was complemented by special after-hours access to the adjacent exhibition of Hockney. Specialised dinners curated in collaboration with galleries and exhibitions suggest that high-end food and fine art are interchangeable and of cultural equivalence. With the aim of expanding the visitor experience, curated dinners reinforce the stereotype that fine art and fine dining are exclusively aligned with the cultural elite (Perugini Kelly, 2015) and that high-end food is perceived as a status symbol and contributes to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984).

⁸ See 'A Taste of France', <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/ey-exhibition-impressionists-london/taste-france> (Accessed 30 October 2017).

⁹ See 'Dinner and David Hockney', <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/david-hockney/dinner-and-david-hockney> (Accessed 30 October 2017).

The collaborative space between art and food is also expanding to include performance. This can be seen within the event program for the recent exhibition, *Rembrandt and the Dutch Golden Age* hosted by the AGNSW, Sydney, in 2017-2018. Expanding the visitor experience was an exclusive dinner curated in collaboration with celebrity chef Matt Moran and *Chiswick at the Gallery* head chef, Tim Brindley.¹⁰ This was designed as a decadent baroque banquet, inspired by the flavours of the era through a range of authentic fare that would have been consumed by wealthy Dutch patrons from the seventeenth century. Rounding out the senses was a theatrical encounter of baroque performance and music, directed by John Bell with musical curator Paul Dyer (Figure 17).

The Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), in Berridale, Tasmania, is another space where food is seen as an important part the visitor experience, having numerous restaurants, bars and a café located within and around the museum. This also includes their new *Faro* restaurant, located within their recently opened museum extension *Pharos*. Along with *Faro*, this wing was specially built to house four new James Turrell light-based installations. Two of the works require a pre-booked paid ticket, and Mona offers an exclusive ‘Art + Dinner’ package, which guarantees a restaurant reservation and exclusive entry to Turrell’s *Unseen Seen* (2017) and *Weight of Darkness* (2017) installations throughout the evening.¹¹

This alignment of contemporary art and food can be seen as symbolising the rising importance of food as an expressive cultural experience. Within MONA, the AGNSW

¹⁰ See <https://www.sydneyfestival.org.au/2018/rembrandt-live> (Accessed 7 December 2017).

¹¹ See <https://mona.net.au/pharos/info> (Accessed 23 April 2018).

and Tate Britain menus are promoted as being ‘curated’, which suggests that each dish is uniquely designed to enhance experience and activate new levels of engagement. Specifically within *Faro*, Executive Chef Vince Trim has designed signature items such as black margaritas and feral pig eyes encased in ice. Spectacularly plated or innovative dishes like these help to reposition food and cooking as a creative, expressive, intellectual and aesthetic practice (Hollows et al., 2010).



Figure 17 – *Art Gallery of New South Wales, Twitter Feed, 2017*

Curated insta-food

The process of testing expectations around food and dining experiences is similarly reflected in a growing gamut of contemporary food imaging seen online. Examples of this can be seen within the popular curated image feeds of *Gourmetartistry* and *Foodartchefs*, hosted through Instagram. Each handle reposts images personally uploaded by chefs or images from similar curated feeds. A typical example includes ‘Parfait of passion fruit, mandarin orange and chocolate’ and ‘Mango, Coconut and White Chocolate’ (Figures 18 and 19).



Figure 18 - *Gourmetartistry*, Instagram Feed, 2016

On close examination, each dish is curated on multiple levels: first, through a select combination of ingredients; second, through the meticulous plating arrangement. Finally, the image is curated into an image feed with other high-profile chefs on display.

The method of creative design and image selection mirrors the way in which exhibitions are curated, whereby the selection of specific works provides an innovative and original contribution to a larger thematic.



Figure 19 - *Foodartchefs*, Instagram Feed, 2015

Both curated art dinners and curated social media image feeds create a space for the public to simultaneously engage with food and art, in an experience which is guided and augmented by visual representations. This offers the viewer greater access to a boutique culinary experience. As such, curating becomes an expressive way to further refine and deliver new standards of entertainment, authenticity, mastery and innovation. However, it also reinforces high-end cuisine as spectacle; exclusive and typically beyond the capacity of the non-expert.

Fashion-based Food Imaging

Designing the spectacle

The merging of aesthetic domains between food and art is also reflected within the space of fashion-based professional food photographers, with a growing trend by food stylists and designers to embrace undisguised hyperbolic visual tropes. This might include impractical displays of food, such as being suspended mid-air, re-contextualising food in an unfamiliar space, or incorporating food as part of a sculptural arrangement.

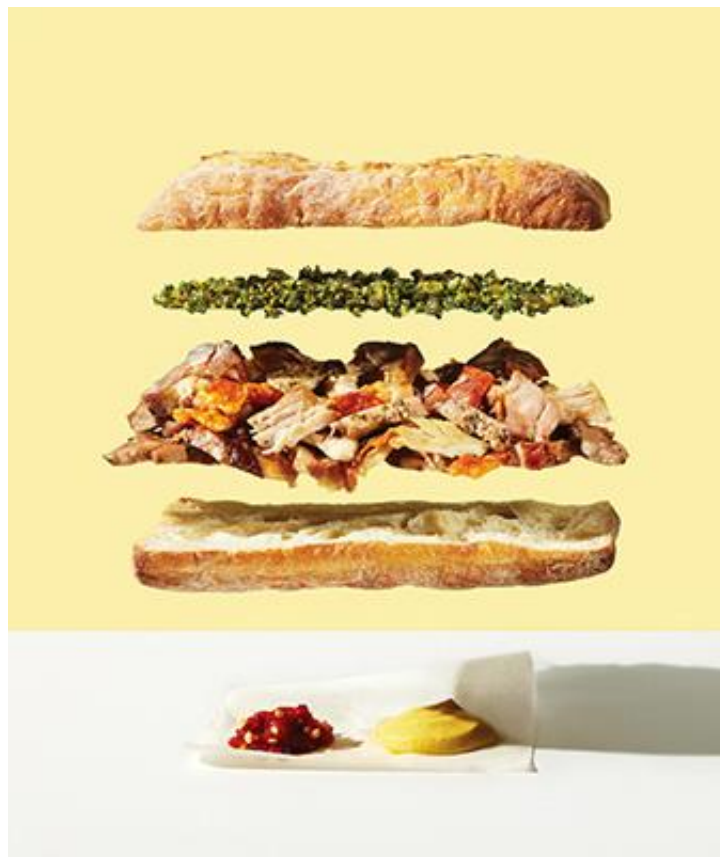


Figure 20 - Michael Crichton and Leigh MacMillan, *Conceptual Food*, 2016

This trend is evident in the photographic collaboration of Michael Crichton and Leigh MacMillan (Figure 20), photographs of Aleksandra Kingo (Figure 21), as well as the photographic collaboration of Kia Utzon-Frank, Owen Silverwood and Dunja Opalko (Figure 22). Recent developments in computer and digital camera technologies provide professional food designers and photographers with more flexibility to create, and as such, an ability to push levels of visual engagement by exploring more philosophical or experimental food concepts. Propelled by an increase in the popularity of food imaging online, a new genre of food imaging has emerged.



Figure 21 - Aleksandra Kingo, *House of Peroni Editorial*, 2015

As seen within these examples, each composition attempts to subvert everyday assumptions around food by adopting provocative or stylised visual aesthetics. This style of image is common within the editorials of popular fashion-based magazines, such as *Wallpaper** or *Vogue*, as well as boutique food and culture journals, like *The Gourmand*.



Figure 22 - Kia Utzon-Frank, Owen Silverwood and Dunja Opalko, *Kufcakes*, 2017

Another key example of this fashion-based design can be seen with Jess Bonham's 2015 exclusive photographs of deconstructed cocktails, commissioned as an editorial project for *The Gourmand* (Figures 23 and 24). Staged by set designer Jamie Brown, all elements of the images are highly considered and perfection is paramount. The use of scientific equipment denotes precision and elevates the specialised role of *mixologist* to a new contemporary level, implying there is a complicated science to making cocktails and that innovation is a process of serious experimentation and research.

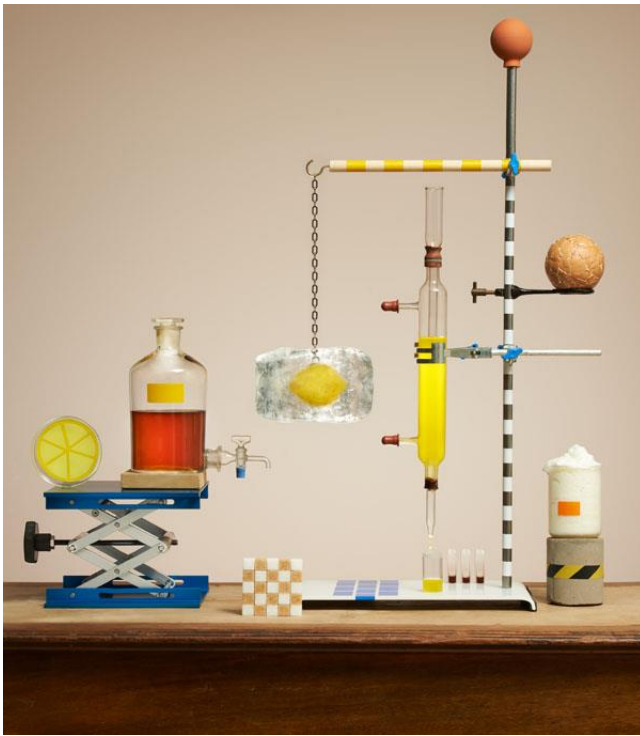


Figure 23 - Jess Bonham, *Measures of Quality - Whiskey Sour*, 2013



Figure 24 - Jess Bonham, *Measures of Quality - Margarita*, 2013

Importantly, there is also no attempt to mask the non-functionality within the design, suggesting that the images are purely aesthetic and have been created for visual entertainment only. Here, food becomes just another compositional element, comparable to other props. All visual elements are balanced, meticulous and considered in their styling. This aligns with the philosophy of the journal, illustrating an aim to expand the discussion around the contemporising blend of food and culture. Most significant is the deliberate contrivance of a fictitious space, where food is seen as elite and sophisticated.

Within this new genre of representations, food transcends its former status as a documented object to become a tool of creative exploration. The application of disruptive creative devices has enabled commercial photographers to harness the

capacity for food to become visual narrative, which popularises and disseminates complex connections between food and cultural identity (Klanten et al., 2017). Within these newly adopted aesthetics of digital manipulation and creative disruption, there is an intentional blurring of boundaries between what is real and artificial. These images are neither read as deceptive nor an attempt to accurately represent food. Instead, they generate a stylised experience of food that extends the parameters of normal vision.

The stylisation and design that underpin these images are similar to devices used in popular food imaging, just pushed to a more overt and spectacular level. Embracing augmentation underlines a desire to transform food into spectacle and performance (Debord, 1994), which is designed to furnish the fashion trends and popular demands of the digital image economy (Ibrahim, 2012). This suggests a new contemporary dimension to the food porn genre and a blending of aesthetics between art, food and design.

Everything new is old

Popular food imaging also draws inspiration from a range of recognisable creative devices used within artworks of the twentieth century, which are then re-contextualised through a commercial lens. Examples include absurd arrangements, combinations or constructions of food, which are not dissimilar to the surrealist sculptures that aimed to subvert the familiarity of our domestic makeup in the 1930s. Reminiscent within the unprecedented levels of digital photographic accuracy are the visual intricacies characteristic of photorealist painting of the 1960s.



Figure 25 - Murizio Di Iorio, *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin Editorial*, 2016



Figure 26 - Murizio Di Iorio, *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin Editorial*, 2016

An example of this can be seen in photographs of Murizio Di Iorio, shot as part of an editorial project for *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* (Figures 25 and 26). Both images are visually intense, with every inch of the picture plane competing for attention through saturated colour and high levels of detail. This excessive amount of visual information begins to take on an abstract quality, where familiarity is replaced by an exclusive visual experience. The aesthetics adopted by Di Iorio appear to parallel the hyper-realistic paintings of Don Eddy. Compositionally, there are similarities to Eddy's 1979 painting *G-III*, including angle, cropping and subject matter. Subsequently, a similar degree of surface flattening occurs, as excessive detail becomes hard to visually navigate and objects appear to anxiously jostle for position (Figure 27). The saturated colour and lack of visual hierarchy also echoes the aesthetic stylisation

of many photo-realist works of a similar period, including Audrey Flack's 1978 painting, *Bounty* (Figure 28). In this context, Di Iorio's images exhibit a painterly quality, where photographic information appears to have been subjectively mediated and creatively augmented. Flack's painting also reflects the photographic technologies of that period, through a slight blurring of the image and softening of detail. By contrast, Di Iorio retains a sharpness in his images, yet the digital manipulation of colour reflects a similar mood to Flack, which is now read as retro.



Figure 27 - Don Eddy, *G-III*, 1979



Figure 28 – Audrey Flack, *Bounty*, 1978

These comparisons reveal the very fluid nature of fashion-based food images and how recognisable visual devices are often recycled from modern art movements. This suggests that disruptive visual aesthetics are regularly recycled within contemporary food imaging and are indicative of the visual trends within contemporary culture, which include creative traits such as augmentation, manipulation and appropriation. Most important is how digital technologies have increased the creative proficiency of food image creators. A significant influence on this aesthetic trajectory is how innovative images flourish within a visually competitive online environment.

Expanding Photography and the Animated GIF

A rise in digital technologies has revealed how the defining visual parameters of photography are changing and its relationship to other mediums is becoming more

permeable (Batchen, 2009). For example, access to applications such as Instagram has provided new digital frames that allow users to easily participate within the tuned aesthetics that visualise a curated lifestyle (Lev Manovich, 2017). The democratisation of digital imaging tools has seen a subsequent increase of image manipulation and interaction with photographs and videos online. Within most messaging services, language-based communications are often substituted by emojis, memes or GIFs (Highfield et al., 2016).

The popular uptake of ideograms and pictorial extracts to communicate online demonstrates how imaging can effectively layer subtle, but complex meanings. This is epitomised through a recent resurgence in the animated GIF.¹² The GIF not only encapsulates a visually heightened form of layered communication, but also captures the essence of participatory culture from users demonstrating cultural knowledge (Miltner et al., 2017). The animated GIF allows for a more nuanced form of non-verbal communication, which is perceived as more personal or intimate compared with the static photograph (Jiang et al., 2017).

The cinemagraph can be seen as an extension of the GIF, and includes similar gestural quotation and looping qualities. It also exemplifies how commercial interests capitalise

¹² Originally created in 1987, the GIF file (or Graphic Interchange Format) was one of the first image formats to populate the internet. Able to accommodate limited bandwidth, the GIF was an effective early format that allowed image transmission with lossless compression, albeit reduced to a 256 individual colour gamut (Usselman, 2017). Distinctive characteristics of the animated GIF include silence, relatively low quality, as well as having a hard reset point within a short sequenced automated loop (Miltner et al., 2017). Despite initially being developed to provide animated visual content for early websites, the animated GIF has recently found a contemporary re-application, with users embracing the format in a nostalgic way (D. Rubinstein, 2012). The animated GIF today is typically created through appropriated material sourced from popular culture; for example, quotations from well know movies or TV series (Miltner et al., 2017).

on the popularity of digital content, as public digital assets transition into commodity exchange (Uhlin, 2014). However, the cinemagraph is typically created from original source material and avoids the jarring hard-reset point during its programmed loop through a more seamless transition. This leads to subtler degrees of autonomous movement, which becomes isolated and fixating through a self-contained infinite pocket of time. The cinemagraph highlights the ongoing expansion of the photograph through manipulation and its critical contribution to a digital lexicon that grants users a broader range of visual tools to explore and express cultural concerns online.

The Cinemagraph

Described as a video and photographic hybrid, cinemagraphs can be created using image editing software, such as Photoshop, and combine a still image with a subtle amount of movement in a small part of the composition, captured in an infinite loop (Usselman, 2017). This combination of masking and motion creates a mannered style cinematic movement through an isolation of gesture that appears trapped within a photograph. This can be described as inducing a hypnotic state through a harmony of stasis and perpetual motion. Since its invention in 2011 by fashion photographer Jamie Beck and graphic designer Kevin Burg, cinemagraphs have become an important visual strategy for advertisers.¹³ It is not surprising that popular food imaging has explored a

¹³ The cinemagraph is attributed with increased levels of advertising engagement posted on social media as described by the president of the marketing company XenoPsi, Michael Flicker. He suggests that cinemagraphs have ‘71% higher organic reach than still photographs’ and that the ‘auto-play looping’ makes cinemagraphs ‘easy to consume, but hard to ignore’ (Flicker, 2016 n.p.).

cinemagraphic approach over the simplistic GIF format in its search for new ways to seduce audiences and draw the gaze.

An example of this can be seen within the visual media of professional food photographers, *Kitchen Ghosts*.¹⁴ Cinemagraphs capture steaming prawns, bread dripping with olive oil and the crisp bead of champagne, all endlessly cycling in a seamless loop. The effect is both seductive and mesmerising, with familiar gestures functioning independently of traditional notions that define temporality. This is accentuated through time being slowed, repeated and presented as non-linear. It is also captured within the high production values of the photographic source material, drawing on key tropes of lighting, framing and depth of field, building intimacy through a personalised narrative. It is hard not to see these images as photographic apparitions that have somehow transcended the traumatic irreversibility of time, traditionally captured as trace within the photograph (Barthes, 1981; Usselman, 2017).

Captured through such refined perfection, the immortal looping of isolated gesture carries an air of uncanniness. The autonomous nature of the movement is unmistakably mechanical and unsettling. Nonetheless, this may be part of the cinemagraph's underlying appeal, not simply drawing the gaze, but fixating it. Whereas popular food imaging allows the viewer to be drawn into an intimate space that hints at unattainability, the cinemagraph deploys a more prescriptive form of engagement that is less flexible in accommodating personal projection. Despite this difference in approach, the personal significance of the cinemagraph is not lessened and it retains a

¹⁴ For an example see the *Kitchen Ghosts* ' website <https://kitchenghosts.carbonmade.com> (Accessed 2 March 2018).

desirable air of possibility. Despite the cinemagraph being an obvious digital fabrication that relies on implausibility and exaggeration, potentiality stems from its capacity to subvert time. The still photograph is an isolated moment captured from a continuum, but a cinemagraph becomes an isolated moment that appears to capture time itself.



Figure 29 - Darko Kontin, *Salami Platter for Croatian Food Company*, 2017

The cinemagraph has the potential to liberate food imaging from narrative, thereby allowing it to focus on expression and pure aesthetic experience. However, observations suggest that these food-based cinemagraphs currently remain focused on more conventional imaging styles. For example, this can be seen in captured stills of cinemagraphs created by Darko Kontin, Nightflare Creative and Giles Christopher (Figures 29, 30 and 31).

Kontin's cinemagraph draws from tropes identified under the image frames of entertainment and authenticity, where a generous bounty of antipasti appears to be

overflowing on to a rustic table (Figure 29). By contrast, the cinemagraph by Nightflare Creative suggests a much more refined and exotic experience, as found under the image frame of innovation (Figure 30). Finally, Christopher's cinemagraph touches on mastery, where perfection and control appear paramount (Figure 31).



Figure 30 - Nightflare Creative, *Fig Salad*, 2017

Each of these creations displays high production values and has used movement to amplify a sense of intimacy. This includes looped based gestures of pouring and dripping.

By selecting, organising and presenting isolated movement within a photographic composition, time has effectively become another curated visual trope. It has also been observed that the cinemagraph is yet to be widely explored as a photographic substitute within the genre of high-end food imaging.



Figure 31 - Alex Davies, *Waffle Pancakes*, 2017

Conclusion

This contextual analysis suggests similarities between the curatorial practices of galleries and online image feeds, where processes of selection and assemblage guide viewer engagement. Key to facilitating engagement is utilising a variety of mediums, such as photography and video together. This has diversified viewing experiences and broadened potential audience engagement. It has also been observed that curation has become increasingly self-styled, facilitated through online interactions and a widening gamut of gallery-based experiences. This raises the expectations of the non-passive or interactive viewer, by encouraging participation.

Within this expanding environment of knowledge exchange, we see a growing connection between the cultural domains of food and art. This includes a blurring of roles between producer, critic, curator and consumer. Interesting, too, is the alignment

of the gallery, visual and fine dining experiences. By giving greater cultural recognition to food, including its various forms of visual expression, these practices suggest that food is now a legitimate space for authentic cultural experience. This is seen through the *Harvest* exhibition catalogue, aligning the work of artists and chefs, as well as in curated dinners hosted by major art institutions.

An examination of the visual tropes seen with the designed fashion-based realm of contemporary food imaging suggests that the philosophical concepts, which underpin food cultural relations, are being more readily explored within popular media. The crossover between these domains of food imaging, including designed, high-end dining, fine art and social media, forms a rich multidimensional space that is dynamic, interactive and perpetually evolving. This contextual analysis highlights the need to critically examine the expanding space of contemporary food imaging, and highlights a gap in investigating the significance of its expanding role across the multiple domains of popular and creative arts culture. This also includes the multifaceted nature of visual engagement online through popular digital editing tools and augmented photos, in the form of cinemagraphs.

Through this analysis, key terms have been identified that directly link to the studio research. These include: curation (how an image is choreographed, designed and visually consumed, independently as well as adjacent to other images); appropriation (how visual tropes, styles or entire images are re-contextualised and recycled); creative disruption (how styling devices of augmentation and prioritisation elicit engagement); and multimedia (how presenting concepts through contrasting mediums shifts engagement and broadens awareness). As such, the adoption of a dual-medium

approach within studio based research becomes part of an expanded curatorial experience. Part 2 of the exegesis will describe studio research methodologies and examine these terms against the four image frameworks of entertainment, authenticity, mastery and innovation.

PART 2

Chapter 4: Entertainment

Introduction

Through studio research, the frame of entertainment has been identified as an important space to explore the mannerisms of embellished styling commonly embraced within contemporary food imaging. This includes image editing and manipulation derived from digital technologies. Under this frame, exaggerated visual devices are excessively applied to build intimacy and draw the gaze. From a surplus of visual information, created through a variety of colour, texture and excessive detail, the viewer can vicariously indulge in the visual treat and refined spectacle that is high-end food imaging.

Within studio research, digital manipulation has been applied to existing photographs in order to explore the application of embellished design and styling to intensify representation within food imaging. This strategy is used as a means to echo the sumptuousness of food porn, where exaggerated styling amplifies already engaging visual tropes to levels of excess. The interpretation of these digitally enhanced images through hyper-realistic painting also investigates a linkage between visual pleasure and vicarious consumption and a search for uniqueness within the information-saturated online environment. Here, the mannerisms of digital manipulation and the excessive detail of hyper-realism are employed to reflect levels of intimacy built up within food images.

This chapter first examines how image editing technologies have become commonplace. Studio research is considered through a suite of three artworks that combine the choreographed styling of digital manipulations through paint. This will be discussed through the process of re-contextualisation, as well as spatial and representational conflicts purposely generated through hyper-realism. Mannerism is compared to digital manipulation, to suggest that both genres prioritise visual abundance through exaggerated representation. Pop Art is explored in the context of the recent democratisation of digital technologies, as a means to critique popular systems. This chapter concludes by reviewing how the studio research has built an alternate visual space to observe exaggerated gestural functions within food imaging.

Analogue versus Digital

A combination of digital and analogue methodologies has been explored through a series of three large paintings (Figures 32, 33 and 34). These include using both Photoshop and painted hyper-realism¹⁵ as contrasting methods to manipulate found images. Each work is based on a high-end food image sourced online, which I subjected to a range of digital manipulations before translating into paint. These included using

¹⁵ Hyper-realism is typically defined as an expanded form of photo-realism that uses exaggerated representation to convey an augmented reality. Within this exegesis, the term hyper-realism also refers to painted realism that is synonymous with, but not limited to, using photography as a visual reference for creation. Unlike photo-realism, which uses paint to fabricate photographic illusion, hyper-realism aims to critique it, disrupting an already acquainted visual language through augmentation, to reveal a novel perspective (Marandel, 1971). The illusionistic veneer of painted hyper-realism therefore does not attempt to imitate reality, but offer up a more attractive or challenging visual alternative (Baudrillard, 1988).

digital techniques of cropping, deletion, arrangement, blurring and masking. The image selection process was guided primarily by my visual preferences, with the aim of reflecting the consumption of food imaging online. A hundred images were originally collected, with examples exhibiting high-production values and a range of innovative aesthetics typical of high-end visual tropes. These included creative interventions such as meticulous plating and food that has been transmuted through cooking. Other visual devices considered included a variety of photographic frames such as camera angle, light and proximity. The database was then curated down to twenty select images that were manipulated through Photoshop. Digital processes of cropping, cloning, arrangement and masking were used; these of course also reflected common analogue creative techniques used in painting. However, manipulation and re-combination are also important systems that broker contemporary relations online.¹⁶

The final paintings in the studio research expanded on aesthetics typical of high-end food imaging, exaggerating degrees of seductive design and styling. For example, as seen in *Untitled III* (Figure 32), all of the food elements are perfectly arranged through a harmony of visual aesthetics created through combinations of colour and texture. Here, we can see a variety of visual elements and a saturation of detail reminiscent of images seen within the frame of entertainment (Figure 9). This creates an intimate

¹⁶ Online interactions are mediated through digital-based interfaces, such as a computer browser or phone application. These devices, and their software, become key tools to broker contemporary relations between ‘us and our world (designation), but also between us and our fellow man (communication), and between us and ourselves (self-understanding)’ (De Mul, 2009, p. 95). Popular and creative communications, including artworks, can also be examined against this term, seen as visual interfaces that broker various personal, political and observational interactions. These can be described through the computing operations of Add, Browse, Change and Destroy (ABCD), which informs how database information is managed and used (De Mul, 2009). These digital actions describe how negotiating information has now become interactive and non-static, where visual elements, such as photographs, are subject to manipulation and recombination.

image that alludes to celebration, dining out and pleasure gained from food. Adding digital manipulations elevated this compositional balance to a new level, which in turn alluded to an elaboration of visual abundance. For example, this was explored by suggesting the plate had begun to dissolve. This implies that it has been pushed beyond a static or familiar state and transformed into a perceptually unfolding aesthetic element. It also alludes to the idea that all visual elements of the image, including the food, are now part of an exclusively decorative space.



Figure 32 - Nathan Taylor, *Untitled III*, 2017

These digital additions and adjustments of the image can be aligned to the traits of food porn, where already desirable visual traits are amplified through design and styling. Here, the quantity of visual information has been pushed to an excessive level and, as

such, signification becomes intensified. Similar to food porn, a prioritisation of visual aesthetics builds fantasy through a sense of opulence and frivolity. It also starts to tease out a sense of anticipation by visualising the unattainable.

Another example can be seen in *Untitled II* (Figure 33), where the plate also appears to be liquefying, so that some of the food appears to act independently of the original plated arrangement. The digital repositioning of these two orange hemispheres aims to re-contextualise them as purely design-based elements and to foreground the strategically choreographed composition.



Figure 33 - Nathan Taylor, *Untitled II*, 2017

Within all three large paintings, digital manipulations applied to images prior to painting were deliberately designed to be unsubtle. My intention here was to ensure that creative additions could be easily recognised from common digital editing practices. Manipulation was predominantly contained to more design-based stylisation, which attempted to amplify already existing visual aesthetics. Initial manipulations included removing the background and replacing this with a gradient-based colour field. This aimed to free the image from its original context, refocus the eye and reduce the peripheral space to a schematic construction. This can be seen in all three paintings, but most clearly in *Untitled II* (Figure 33). Here, we see the common food imaging camera angle of looking down; as a result, we also expect to see part of a table-top or other flat surface. Instead, the plate appears to float in space. As in *Untitled III*, this is further exaggerated by rendering the edge of plate as if it were starting to melt away. Replacing the table-top with a colour field also inverted the orientation of the image from a horizontal position to a vertical one, making it appear as if the dessert is defying gravity or could slip off its surface at any stage.

Other manipulations included experimenting with cropping, repositioning individual elements, and enhancing contrast, colour balance and levels. These digital interventions built up a mannered translation of reality by increasing the quantity of detail and embellishment available. An example of this can be seen in *Untitled I* (Figure 34). During the manipulation of this photograph, I deliberately cropped out a majority of the image, including the rim of the plate. The intention here was to de-contextualise the food within the composition, amplifying its abstract qualities in order to shift its visual function beyond comestible. Further manipulations included amplifying the reflections under and around the food by adjusting contrast, levels and saturation. This

drew out the subtle and abstract reflections typically overlooked within such an image, which could then be activated through paint. Stimulating the visual dynamic of the image in this way closely mirrors the decadence identified within the image frame of entertainment, where lavish levels of visual information imply frivolity, self-indulgence and hedonistic pleasure. This is also reminiscent of food porn, where surplus detail prompts visual arousal and produces an awareness of intimacy.



Figure 34 - Nathan Taylor, *Untitled I*, 2017

Having technological roots in the 1990s, these techniques of image manipulation are familiar and, in digital terms, relatively old. Any contemporary application of these in design terms could be potentially considered relatively colloquial. However, digital technologies have democratised the creative language of photography, opening up new

modes of fabrication, alteration and presentation. My decision to apply these manipulations to the contemporary genre of high-end food imaging suggests a similar reframing to that of an Instagram filter. The recent popularity of such photographic alterations highlights how aesthetic manipulation is used to personalise online communications¹⁷ (Highfield et al., 2016). This photographic evolution has liberated food imaging beyond standard frames of documentation, thereby accommodating aspirational food preferences and an appetite for the visually spectacular.

Re-contextualising Digital Manipulations

The process of using conventional software to digitally edit images extracted from online sources echoes methodologies adopted by postmodern movements, such as Pop Art. For example, using the print-based technologies of the time, such as silkscreen and collage, artists such as Andy Warhol and Richard Hamilton disrupted the familiar remnants of popular culture through re-presentation and re-combination. In doing so, the sign-based rhetoric of media imagery could be viewed objectively. Artworks became a combination of recognisable visual quotations re-mixed to form a new exaggerated visual language. Seen in Hamilton's 1956 work *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* (Figure 35), objects and media are manipulated through collage. Here, seeming banal representations are re-presented as fragmented, enhancing their consumerist significance to emotional effect. This helps

¹⁷ Free access to applications such as Instagram have cemented this belief, by making the use of filters and image adjustments easy, routine and aesthetically fashionable (Lev Manovich, 2017).

to disrupt the semblance of advertising, revealing its visual structures of aspiration, distraction and ambiguous signs.



Figure 35 - Richard Hamilton, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* 1956

Through this work, Hamilton also explores the role of exaggeration as a key trope within the visual repertoire of the culture industry (Foster, 2003). My studio research has attempted to mirror aspects of this approach, by employing digital processes that are seen as freely accessible to the public. In doing so, the studio research simultaneously invests, investigates and responds to the digital environment that underpins the online network of contemporary food imaging.

An example of this attempt to shift familiarity can be seen in *Untitled I* (Figure 34). Through painterly translation, the synthetic qualities of the food items start to be revealed. While hyper-realism maintains the semblance of the image, the enhanced peculiarities of the forms and textures almost appear over-embellished and slightly artificial. By enhancing a sense of the synthetic, my creative actions become partly ironic, utilising ‘representation and artistic language...as both a target and a weapon’ (Foster, 1985, p. 100).

By examining the often-overlooked visual thresholds of food imaging where exaggerated visual tropes teeter precariously between being fashionable, avant-garde and even kitsch,¹⁸ the translation into paint, the flawlessness and refined nature of the digital constructions begin to falter and reveal a shallow world, which is visually detached from reality. This closely resembles the visual overstatement and hard-to-read visual field of Mannerist artworks from the sixteenth century (Saltz, 2010; Schwabsky, 2014).¹⁹ Mannerist artworks, such as *The Madonna with the Long Neck*, c. 1535-1540

¹⁸ There are similarities between the identified tropes in popular food imaging and the defining parameters of kitsch. These include visual triggers that spark a predisposed positive emotional response from the viewer, a typically conservative yet novel temperament, as well as an inability to challenge the viewer’s experience in a significant way, meaning it neither raises questions nor requires deep investigative interpretation as seen within works of art (Kulka, 1996).

¹⁹ Parallels can be drawn between the visual tropes of popular food imaging and the historical movement of Mannerism, which emerged out of a comparable period of social change and rapid developments in imaging technology (Saltz, 2010). Similar to the media climate today, mass-produced imagery puts a premium on developing novel and engaging visual vocabularies (Eisenstein, 1980). Mannerists focused on merging properties from different systems in unique ways, the basis for creation fashioned out of existing visual elements, including existing artworks, rather than from nature (Hauser, 1986; Rowe, 2014). These augmented aesthetics became a reflection of creative fantasy and technical proficiency and prescribed gestures (Monahan, 2011). Similar to contemporary food imaging, visual overstatement and

by Parmigianino (Figure 36) and *Vertumnus (Emperor Rudolf II)*, 1590 by Giuseppe Arcimboldo (Figure 37), can be identified through self-conscious, styled exaggerations. Here, distorted or fabricated interpretations are prioritised over realistic representation, including elongated anatomy and illogical architectural forms (Rowe, 2014).



Figure 36 - Parmigianino, *The Madonna with the Long Neck*, c. 1535-1540

Arcimboldo's painting also entertains visual paradoxes, but in the form of how the image appears to flip between two perspectives, that of the figure and the individual

strangeness help to build visual intensity and prescribe greater virtue on what is being presented (Schwabsky, 2014).

items of food. Both these examples exhibit carefully rendered natural details, but simultaneously use undisguised tricks of pictorial illusion to shift perceptions. This style of visual disruption closely resembles contemporary modes of imaging, where visual elements are morphed, disaggregated and remade through digital manipulation (Kaufmann, 2009). Such styling can be seen displaying a surplus or bounty of food, where the artist offers up a visual feast. It also suggests an awareness of how representation is quickly separated from its original connotation to become a virtual apparition.



Figure 37 - Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Vertumnus (Emperor Rudolf II)*, 1590

As seen within *Untitled I* (Figure 34), dissolving parts of the original image, replacing the background, as well as adding in digitally rendered paint splashes, visually disrupts

any structured link to reality. Like Mannerist works, this painting deliberately fabricates spatial and representational conflicts to create a sense of visual anxiety. As such, the pictorial field becomes flattened and hard to visually penetrate. Similar to *Untitled II* (Figure 33), the painting begins to flip between the window of illusion and the painting as object (Poggi, 1988). This pictorial conflict has also been tested in *Untitled III* (Figure 32), by allowing gestural paint spills to leak out of the surrounding border onto the representation. Disrupting the illusion of painted realism alludes to the notion that contemporary reality is itself a construction, especially when experienced through digital photographic representation (Rowe, 2014).

Through studio research, I have deliberately used Photoshop as an extension of creative experimentation, replacing physical processes with digital simulations on a screen (Annum, 2014). This included using layers to manipulate the compositional structure of the images, which partially simulated pictorial space as it is created within traditional painting techniques. Despite the similarities between these analogue and digital-based methods, there are obvious differences, mainly stemming from a lack of surface variation and physicality. For example, in Photoshop texture and depth is suggested rather than physically represented and becomes a visual supplement for tangible engagement (Bruno, 2014). This has aimed to build tension within the work, using the medium of paint to reveal digital processes, rather than develop a work that uses the inherent qualities of paint naturally. This can be seen within each of the three paintings, where the flat gradient base colour fields are combined with overlaid white rendered splashes. Here, the lack of depicted depth and the smoothness of the rendering make each surface flatten out. Even though the items of food are rendered to suggest real space, this illusionary depth remains in constant pictorial battle with the digital gestures.

Choreographed Intimacy

Within all high-production food imaging, processes of design and styling are used to choreograph a sense of intimacy, creating a personal space that draws the gaze. Typically captured through a short depth of field, as seen in the images suggestive of the key frame entertainment, food imaging begins to appear familiar and open to our personal projections. Using Photoshop to add digital gestures intended to mirror the processes of design and styling used in food imaging to manage levels of perfection and imperfection. Meticulously translating this visual information through paint creates an objective pictorial reading. This can be seen in *Untitled II* (Figure 33), where the exaggerated gesture appears uncharacteristically static and contradicts the autonomous fluidity of paint. As such, the digitally applied gestures do not disrupt the image, as the splashing of paint can often do, but instead become symbols of design authenticity and aesthetic embellishment.

My aim here was to build visual tensions by transforming painterly splashes into gestural signs, rather than genuine painterly marks. A sense of detachment in this intention is symbolic of how reality is typically perceived through digital-derived imagery (Bacon, 2016). Nevertheless, the success or failure of this strategy does rely on the recognition of digital tropes being applied within an uncharacteristic medium. Although a hyper-realistic approach does risk being lost within more natural painterly aspects of each work, including the subtle imperfections that tarnish the white borders, compositions have been designed to be recognisably mannered. This suggests that the visual strategies used within each large painting can be read as part of a decorative framework. An example can be seen within *Untitled III* (Figure 32), with each visual

element carefully choreographed to be engaging and to beautify the image. As such, a sense of entertainment is captured, where the surplus of design appears to be bursting from the edges of the image. This resembles a key property of food porn, where the food is both idealised and magnified to a spectacular level. There is almost a sense of guilty pleasure attached to the styling, which has created a space that condones playing with food.

Within this investigation, paint has inadvertently become a vehicle of post-production, rather than an expressive medium. Paint becomes descriptive rather than immersive. The precision of my hyper-realistic style is used to construct illusion, amplify visual aesthetics and curate imperfection, similar to how design and styling calibrate an image. As seen within *Untitled III* (Figure 32), the unique qualities of paint - texture, fluidity, flux and depth - have been deliberately suppressed. Instead, a surface is fabricated that appears uniform and unvarying between areas. As a result, the disruptiveness typically generated through paint is restrained. This allows the work to retain a sense of intimacy representative of entertainment style food images, instead of allowing the paint to present a subjective reading.

Revealing Implausibility

Hyper-realism and digital manipulation have been used within studio research to exaggerate and subsequently collapse the plausible space of contemporary food imaging. This includes the ways in which styling often fashions an exaggerated space while maintaining a sense of intimacy. Through my hyper-realistic rendering, representation appears to take on a plastic quality, exacerbated by the use of acrylic

paint. As a result, the surface of each work appears compressed. The pictorial depth normally captured through the photograph, which draws the gaze, becomes unyielding as seen within *Untitled I* (Figure 34). The green background and squashed layers of rendered paint spills transition into the plate, pushing the food towards the viewer instead of pulling the viewer in. I have routinely applied mannered painterly devices, such as saturation, detail and sharp edge quality, in an attempt to counter the subjective space of food imaging that facilitates personal projection through suggested intimacy.

Other painterly devices employed include a deliberate push and pull of space, by activating reflective surfaces, textures and colour. This can be seen in the tight rendering of detail within *Untitled III* (Figure 32), where crumbs, reflections and shadows compete for attention against the arrangement of food. The treatment of paint amplifies a sense of visual tension through fine detail, where rendered items waver between being recognisable and abstract. When viewed adjacent to the rendered paint spills, these details appear to spread, and reveal the larger gestures being composed of smaller painterly marks; flipping the reading of pictorial space within the composition. Here, the layering of different coloured gestures over a gradient background, including grey, pink and white, gives an overall impression of depth; creating a visual paradox, where the viewer is initially pulled in through the promise of photographic detail, but is eventually pushed away when the surface blends into a flattened veneer of painterly abstraction. The application of these painterly devices suggests that the need to maintain a plausible sense of pictorial space is no longer important. It also resembles fabricating an implausible space within photographs through digital manipulation in order to meet online expectations, which services vicarious entertainment and visual consumption.

Conclusion

My studio research would suggest that most contemporary food imaging teeters daringly close to a mannered space, styled through basic digital manipulations, such as post-production. Refining and embellishing visual aesthetics in this way allows already engaging tropes to become augmented. As with the underlying traits of food porn, fascination lies in a capacity to transcend the limits of normal human vision (Baudrillard, 1990). Image editing technologies intensify superfluous visual information and present a fictional space of new possible experiences. The overt amplification of visual aesthetics reaffirms our right to be voyeuristic and alleviates apprehension towards ingesting images as entertainment (Foster, 1993). This suite of three paintings suggests that contemporary food imaging supports vicarious entertainment by using digital manipulation to augment representation.

The democratisation of digital image technologies has certainly contributed to contemporary food imaging, as it develops more innovative visual styles, resulting in the adoption of visual exaggeration and theatricality. The application of visual exaggeration within my research aligns with the search for uniqueness within an evolving digital environment. This can be linked to finding new methods to deepen reality, enabling us to see with fresh eyes and greater intensity. Within the visual saturation of the digital climate, it seems that ever more inflated levels of amplification are required to meet shifting visual thresholds.

Painting and digital manipulation have investigated the limits of gestures, tropes and mannerisms. Hyper-realistic painting has been employed deliberately to shift the

reading of digital manipulations and amplifications. Painted illusion has created an alternate vicarious space to critique a digitally heightened sense of reality, where detail, surface and perspective can no longer be overlooked (Grootenboer, 2005).

The discussion of the three painted works has explored the importance of creating an accessible and inviting space within food imaging to entertain personal projection. The painted translation of digital illusion also reveals that the contextual void of the photograph, which is read as objective, is easily transitioned into a more subjective space. This also suggests that the visual consumption of food is underpinned by subjective desires. Photography remains a powerful digital currency within food media, where images are exchanged, consumed and admired daily, while painting reveals the influence of design and styling within food imaging. This will be examined in greater depth in the next chapter under the frame of authenticity, where ownership and originality will be discussed within the context of online image interactions.

Chapter 5: Authenticity

Introduction

The image frame of authenticity can be used to question the role of originality within the transient nature of the digital climate, including the substitution for direct experience by vicarious engagement. Within food imaging, the defining visual tropes of authenticity reflect a desire for sincerity and reassurance, which is typically visualised through rusticity and cultural depth. Embedded within the interactions of food imaging online, the appeal of authenticity is also reflected through an admiration for originality. Originality and authorship within food media have been explored within studio research by re-contextualising images through paint that have been appropriated from the internet.

This chapter reflects on these ideas through a discussion of three paintings that have re-contextualised high-end food images. Appropriation and its relationship to authorship are discussed in the context of food-based social media, as well as its role as a creative methodology. Ideas around authenticity are also questioned through painterly trace, where direct engagement and fabricated pictorial illusion have revealed the difficulty of competing against digital perfection. This chapter concludes with a discussion of originality within digital food media and how it is reflected in novel displays, as well as through a unique re-mixing of existing elements into an authentic state.

Appropriation

Routine online image appropriation has shaped an online climate of flux and transience, where the authenticity or profoundness of an image can quickly fade or be appropriated. Creative practice continues to both critique and utilise this space, enjoying increased exposure online. However, being non-static, the capacity to maintain a meaningful space for objective reflection becomes challenging, especially amongst the growing visual noise online and haste of image consumption (Lowry, 2014). In the context of these broader concerns, my studio research has integrated the processes of online appropriation within food media.

The use of appropriated imagery has not subverted food imaging culture - in contrast, for example, to how some creative-based activism may reseed false representations into an existing popular visual network (Graw, 2004). Re-contextualisation can also demonstrate awareness towards the routine appropriation of contemporary images online, including ways in which digital technologies are distorting the criteria that defines originality. This frames the use of appropriated imagery as a strategy that strengthens ideas around ownership, rather than undermines them (Irvin, 2005). This suggests that appropriating an image has shifted my responsibility as an artist, from producer to 'manipulator of signs' – a shift which positions the 'viewer as an active reader of messages rather than a passive contemplator of the aesthetic or consumer of the spectacular' (Foster, 1985, p. 100). It also recognises how photographic representation can support numerous meanings (Lowry, 2014).

This has been explored through painterly re-contextualisation, where removing the image from its original context online shifts the reading of its aesthetic makeup. Despite my intention of using paint to deliberately amplify these tropes, the translation into paint disrupts the willing consumption of the spectacle and instead reveals the active visual tropes being employed.

Photographic appropriation

The work of Richard Prince provides a key example of appropriation being used to explore the mechanics of photographic representation within social media, including questioning the veracity behind self-promotion. Prince takes aim at popular photo feeds depicting glamorous portrait images of musicians, models and artists, through appropriated photos captured from screen shots on his mobile phone (Figure 38).

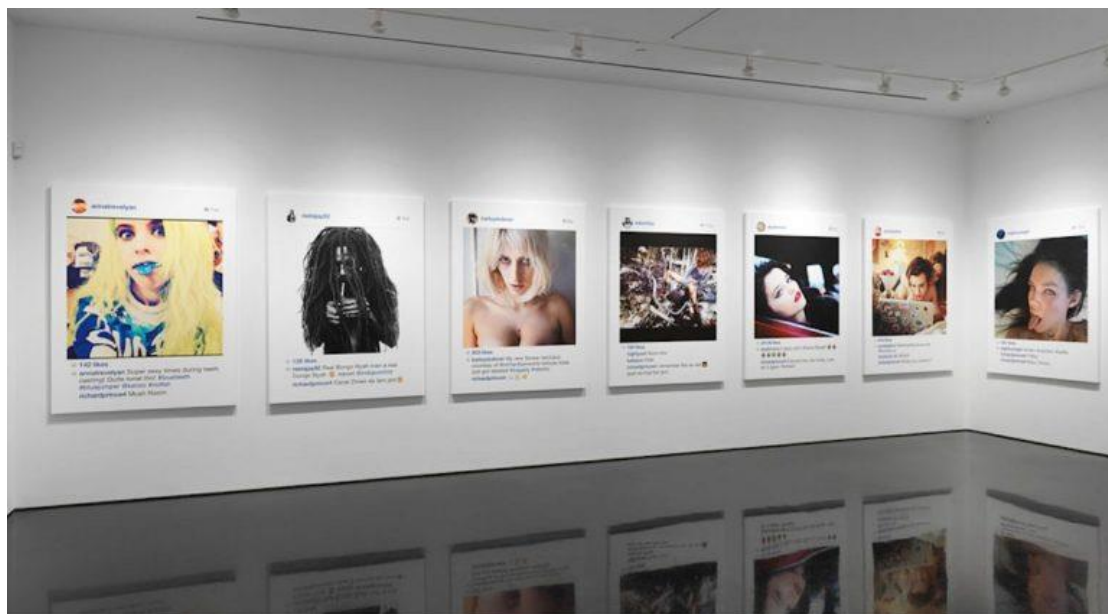


Figure 38 - Richard Prince, *New Portraits (Installation view)*, 2014

This series explores the influence of images posted on social media, including how we recycle images to define identity. Prince establishes a re-evaluation of contemporary image use, highlighting appropriation as a routine online engagement.

Prince's works reflect both a destabilising of the image and an acknowledgement of how society continues to be absorbed into representation (Barthes, 1989; Baudrillard, 1989). Moreover, his images capture the complexity of representation as a form of contemporary critique, especially in relation to its subjective role in assisting society to perceive the world (Foster, 1996).

Appropriation within food media

Within online food media, appropriation has become a key instrument of social engagement. This is particularly obvious within the image feeds of high-end plated dishes seen on Instagram. These spectacular photographs are curated into image feeds, often already re-posted numerous times, both with and without reference to the originating source. As seen within this fairly typical high-end food image (Figure 39), *GastroArt* has reposted the photograph from another user.

The image has been credited against the prefix 'uploaded by', but not specifically 'created by'. Numerous hash-tags have also been applied, including #foodporn and #instafood, in an attempt to maximise exposure. A simple image match search via Google allows images to be partially traced. More often than not, this reveals that an appropriated image can achieve more engagement, through views and likes, than when

originally posted.²⁰ In this context, the value of the original image becomes secondary to where it is re-posted. Meaning and the originality, or ‘aura’, of an image, are determined by its re-framing, its sense of authenticity stemming from re-presentation, rather than initial representation (Davis, 1995; De Mul, 2009).



Figure 39 - *GastroArt*, Instagram Image, 2016

Re-contextualisation

The use of re-contextualisation within studio research expands upon ideas associated with photographic appropriation to explore the function of ownership and originality within digital food media. Painting has been used to represent the subjective nature of

²⁰ *GastroArt* is a good example of an image feed that is entirely built from appropriated content, demonstrating how, within digital food culture, an original contribution can be made exclusively through curating images.

photographic representation. Compositionally, the edge of the canvas functions in a similar way to the edge of the photograph, enabling the viewer to decipher the visual information. Yet, how information is interpreted within each medium is different. The photo is typically seen as an excerpt of an external reality, where the edge fuels speculation and implies possibility. A painting, however, is read internally, mainly referencing itself and its creator (J. Berger, 2001), by using a subjective visual language that is idiosyncratic in nature (Coke, 1972).

Painted re-contextualisation reflects this paradox, by shifting the mood of each image. Painted representation has deliberately suppressed feelings of enticement, normally characteristic to both paint and food imaging, by fabricating an impervious surface that disrupts the viewer's gaze. As such, the strangeness of the photographic vision is revealed and the awkward way paint often translates its information (Marandel, 1971). Regardless of whether the photograph is original or 'found' online, mediating visual information through paint will fundamentally shift the viewer's interpretation (Coke, 1972).

Three-course meal

By using re-contextualisation, the studio research has re-framed the photographic image as both familiar and estranged. Through the process of re-contextualisation, authenticity is reinstalled in the image, repositioning a sense of desire into the painted object. In this context, the physicality of paint alludes to permanence and a sustained duration of the image, which is juxtaposed against the transient currency of online digital food imaging being represented. The slowness of paint thus becomes a natural

combatant to the spectacle (Thomas, 2017), its inherent resistance to ephemerality enabling it to temporarily decelerate the hurried demands of the digital image economy.

The translation of appropriated food imagery through paint was explored through a suite of paintings dubbed the *Three-Course Meal*, with each painting representing a different style of high-end dish. I deliberately wanted the image selection process to be led by subjective interests, in order to mirror consumed and appraised online images. This included being guided by my initial response to an image, as well as reflecting my ordering preferences when dining out. These works investigate the aesthetic and formal attributes of high-end food imaging, including visual stylisation. The use of painted hyper-realism questions how creative disruption has become a familiar trope within food imaging.

Part of exploring ideas that define authenticity within food imaging included surrendering a sense of ownership over the source image that was to be painted. Here, originality has been expressed through image selection, rather than creation. Selecting an image replaces the processes of staging and shooting food myself – just as re-posting or making a personalised comment online reflects how authorship has evolved within the digital environment, taking the form of a recycled society (Lowry, 2013).

Entrée

The first image (Figure 40), depicting a beef dish, was selected for its simplicity and the way in which the plate acted as a negative space against the placement of food. The

off-centre framing of the photograph also makes the composition appear delicate and precise. Initial re-contextualisation of this image included cropping the image into a square, so that the beef became centralised. This shifted the balance of the composition so that it is presented as more claustrophobic. Cropping also reduced the amount of plate edge visible in the composition, which, combined with the lighter tones of the horseradish and sabayon, flattened out any depth within the painting.



Figure 40 - Agnar Sverrisson, *Grain-fed beef fillet with olive oil sabayon and red wine sauce*, 2014

The plate is an important visual stage for high-end food imaging, and is an important component for composition. By focusing on highlights and glazing, paint rendering deliberately intensifies the lustre and redness of the meat. In *Study X (Entrée)* (Figure 41), this has shifted it from being appetising in the photo to suggesting that it is possibly a little under processed.



Figure 41 - Nathan Taylor, *Study X (Entrée)*, 2016

Exaggerating these traits through paint draws focus towards the importance of the decorative elements, careful plating and styling - in this case by the jus, edible flowers and herb garnish. Seeing food that has been heavily mediated builds a sense of reassurance. The sense of authenticity captured in the original image reflects a fetishistic desire to easily govern food's natural state (Foster, 1993). A similar definition of control was investigated within the painting, by purposefully representing the elements as contrived, plastic and potentially inedible compared with its natural state.

Main Course

The next photograph chosen for re-contextualisation (Figure 42) showcases northern sea crab and smoked avocado, and displays a high degree of creativity and skill through meticulous plating and selection of ingredients. The presentation appears measured, with a layering of texture, colour and form that suggests a comprehensive knowledge and sympathetic affiliation with food. The negative space is again an important component of the composition, the balance of food in proportion to the plate centralising our focus.



Figure 42 - Richard van Oostenbrugge, *North Sea Crab with Smoked Avocado*, 2015

Through painterly interpretation, square cropping has been applied with the intention of pushing the food towards the viewer, as opposed to being naturally drawn into the photo (Figure 43). In contrast to the previous painting, the food in *Study XI (Main*

Course) has been deliberately framed asymmetrically, with the aim of shifting the compositional balance to accentuate the verticality of the visual elements.



Figure 43 - Nathan Taylor, *Study XI (Main Course)*, 2016

The protruding garnishes are reminiscent of a coral reef, where an aquatic ecosystem sustains a fragile symbiosis. Colour and texture have been embellished through paint, as a means to intensify the intricacies of the dynamic visual makeup. These painterly enhancements suggest the sublime sense of delicacy that underpins the attraction of the original photo. The angle of the photograph is also reminiscent of a Dutch still life, where the viewer seems to be approaching, or is suspended between, normal viewing perspectives (Grootenboer, 2005). I have aimed to reveal this by exaggerating the

reflective qualities of the plate, specifically the overlooked sybaritic visuals captured against the white of the round void.

Dessert

The final photograph re-contextualised as part of this series captures a rather curious arrangement of dessert-based components, including dark chocolate, cherries and hazelnuts (Figure 44).

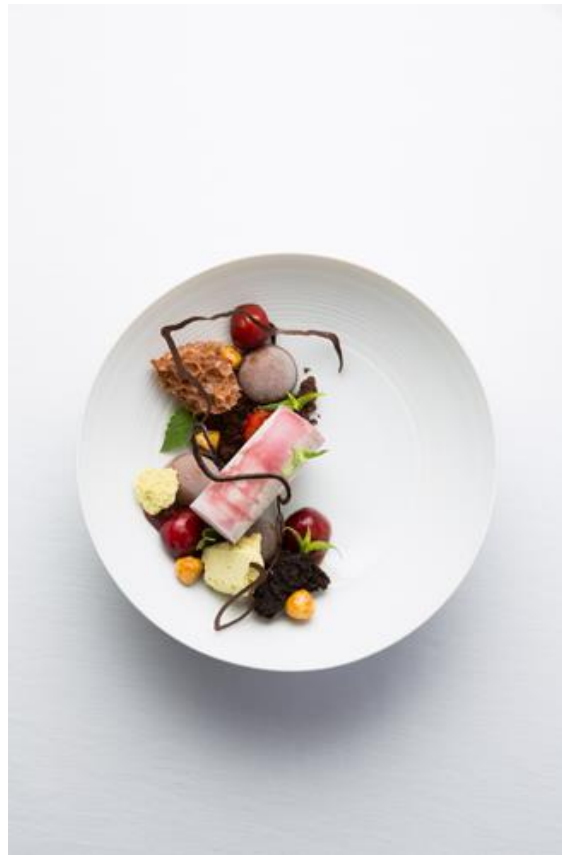


Figure 44 - Curtis Duffy, *Dark Chocolate, Cherries and Hazelnuts*, 2014

Similar to the crab dish, the clarity of the photo makes it appear clean and contemporary, which draws focus towards the interesting array of contrasting textures, colour and line. In *Study XII (Dessert)*, these deliberate visual juxtapositions are

exaggerated by increasing the saturation of colour and refining edge quality (Figure 45). The intention here was to draw out the sense of unfamiliarity in the food, so that it appears almost abstract in nature.



Figure 45 - Nathan Taylor, *Study XII (Dessert)*, 2017

At the same time, I have tried to maintain a sense of affiliation with the image through paint, by demonstrating that all aspects of the composition have received equal attention during their careful rendering. I aimed to quell any sense of ambiguity around the food and instead reflect an appreciation of its innovative qualities. Integral to this photo is the bird's eye view, reflecting a common camera angle and visual strategy used in food imaging online. The cropping applied to the original image emphasises how plates are comfortably framed within the square proportions of online image platforms such as

Instagram. As such, this composition also foregrounds the strategic nature of unbalanced plating, which begins to echo a tondo style painting.

These three paintings explore how visual attraction is built into each of the original photos and how significance is found by negotiating the unfamiliarity of its visual content. Here, the originality of each dish is represented through novelty, with paint offering a way to re-present authenticity through a firsthand experience. The use of re-contextualisation within these works creates an almost contradictory space where the universal familiarity of the photographic image is presented as personal. Viewed together, the three paintings resemble a personally curated food image fantasy.

Creative Trace

As part of this translation through paint, layers of creative framing have been applied - just as food media uses framing to make photographic content more manageable, attainable and consumable (Rousseau, 2012). For example, this may include a website viewed within a screen or a recipe printed within a book. In addition to square cropping, re-contextualised images have been situated within a white border. This has been applied to all paintings within the *Three-Course Meal*, acting as an additional compositional frame to emphasise the cropped edge of the original image. This creates a more restricted space that highlights any subtle anxieties captured within the painted representation. It also renders visual consumption habits conscious to the viewer, by building distance from the viewer's gaze. As such, the representational space becomes a painting within a painting. Of course, the white border is also reminiscent of a

Polaroid, a blatant 1970s photographic reference, but can also be seen as alluding to the nostalgic adoption of similar framing within Instagram.

The white borders, also applied to the suite of large paintings, were deliberately left unfinished, with areas of the raw substrate emerging through multiple semi-transparent layers of spills and splashes. I decided to work up this space in a random fashion, with some of the opaquer gestures subsequently accentuated through glazing.

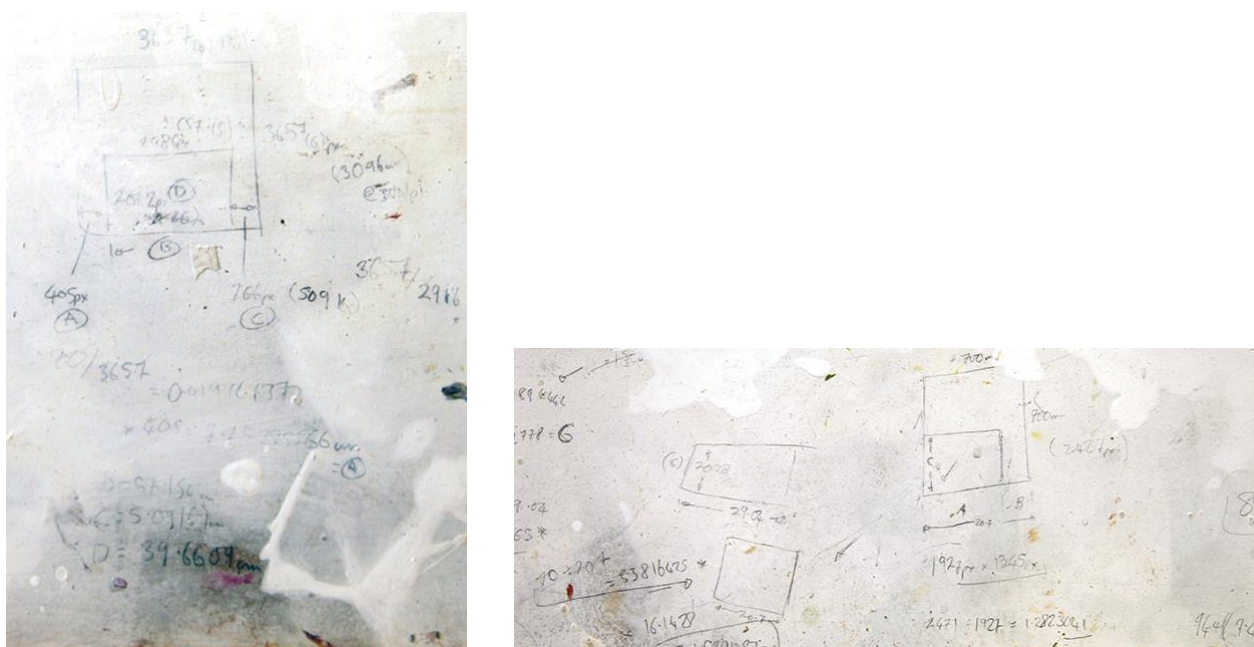


Figure 46 - Nathan Taylor, *Untitled II* and *Untitled I (Details)*, 2017

These borders are a visual counterpoint to the more mannered painterly gestures captured within the inner frames of the larger paintings. They also serve a counterpoint to the tightness of the hyper-realistic representation within both suites, revealing a creative shift from interpretation to representation. Strategies that emphasise this process of subjective interpretation include accentuating a sense of pictorial flatness

against high glazing. This activates a shift in pictorial depth by allowing the image to flip between a window of illusion and the painting as object (Poggi, 1988).

The partially completed appearance of this space becomes part of a finished work that is disguised as a preliminary stage (R. Rubinstein, 2009). This hints at the analogue presence of paint within a world of perfect digital imaging. The physicality of the painting is also revealed through this space, framing the pictorial illusion as fabricated. On close inspection, it can also be seen that the white borders play host to numerous small painterly mistakes, pencil drafting lines, mathematical calculations and slivers of masking tape (Figure 46). This can be seen as evidence of my creative intent and direct engagement with each work, the trace demonstrating the authenticity of the creation.

Conclusion

As described through *Three-Course Meal*, research processes of re-contextualising appropriated images have been led by the subjective interpretation of photographic information through paint. Even through hyper-realistic rendering, repositioning knowledge in this way will see a loss or shift of accurate visual information. However, this is compensated for through an increase in authenticity brought about by personal investment (Davis, 1995). What remains uncertain is whether the analogue processes of paint and its tangible outcomes are capable of holding on to this transferred value in a digital climate of routine appropriation.

Despite appropriation becoming a normalised part of online interactions, with images recycled multiple times, the fashions of popular culture and its preference for novelty

will inevitably curse the image with a limited lifespan. Through re-contextualisation, *Three-Course Meal* suggests that this lifespan can be extended. As a result, however, it is not photographic connotation that is preserved, but rather a memory or record of that representation (Foucault, 1999). In this context, painting has the capacity to create an independent space that can afford time to consider the disposable world of contemporary food images, including its digital democratisation.

Part of this re-evaluation considers how images operate to shape individual realities, including a growing reliance on using appropriated images within routine online engagements (Linden, 2016). Re-contextualisation highlights that the act of originality within digital culture is not dependant on creating new things, but, instead, can be found from existing elements that are re-mixed or curated into an original state. As a result, it seems that authenticity has now been liberated from authorship, where value is personally found from the way an image is used or re-presented.

The next chapter will expand on the rituals that underpin hyper-realistic painting against the frame of mastery. This includes how perfection and control is visually exhibited through painterly skill as well as through the personal investment of time and labour.

Chapter 6: Mastery

Introduction

Within the studio research, the image frame of mastery has been identified as a key space to explore the normalising of traits such as perfection, control and the demonstration of skill within contemporary food imaging. Through this frame, the one can feel a sense of reassurance from seeing food that has been heavily mediated and take enjoyment through the vicarious consumption of the unattainable. Painted hyper-realism has been used to explore the interventions of ritual and perfectionism underpinning the design and styling within food media which generates a sense of detachment that disrupts the verisimilitude of food imaging.

This chapter discusses the fundamental traits of hyper-realistic painting. These ideas are then explored through a suite of small painting studies that test how hyper-realism is used to embellish an image. This includes intensifying formal aspects of the image, such as detail and colour saturation, to emphasise food imaging as ornamental. Key traits that underpin the mastery of hyper-realistic painting, including its ritualistic processes and the pursuit of perfection, are then discussed. This includes examining how personal investment through time and labour reflects a desire for personal autonomy that is gained through a demonstration of expertise. The strategy of hyper-realism has been applied in order to refine the elements of an image, by controlling imperfection and visual disruptions that may reflect fallibility, and to conjure a sense of complete mastery over the medium.

Hyper-realism

Through a revival of representational painting in the 1960s, artists explored how the domestication of photography was affecting cultural relationships through emotional distancing. Commonly described as photo-realism, super-realism or new-realism, the work of artists such as Robert Bechtel, Chuck Close, Malcolm Morley and Audrey Flack questioned photography's role within popular culture and its capacity to foster indifference regarding its content (Chase, 1975). Through painterly re-contextualising, photo-realists critiqued the medium of photography itself, and examined how representation was becoming a supplement for experience.

Comparisons can be drawn between contemporary food imaging and hyper-realism, including how familiar attributes of representation are exaggerated to elicit engagement. Hyper-realism therefore becomes a fitting vehicle to critique the role of popular visual communication, and draws our attention to a routine visual language that is ripe with embellishment and detachment (Chase, 1975). The adoption of hyper-realism focuses my critique, not only on the object rendered in paint, but also - more importantly - on the object's representation (Lucie-Smith, 1979). As such, my research examines the image surface, using paint to negotiate the freedoms and restrictions present within the trapped veneer of illusion (Dyckes, 1975).

This can be seen in *Study VI*, where early testing applied traits of trompe-l'oeil to deliberately disrupt the painting surface (Figure 47). Making the surface appear dented and ripped aims to draw the viewer back to the painting as object (Fried, 1998), whilst simultaneously referring to both the construction of photographic and painterly illusion.

As a form of contemporary trompe-l'oeil, the subtle decay that eats away at painterly perfection questions the truth within painting and the underlying control within representation (Poloni, 2010). It also alludes to my inescapable obsession, derived from rituals of hyper-realistic painting - its meticulously rendered blemishes symbolic of my own artistic anxieties (Bond, 2012).



Figure 47 - Nathan Taylor, *Study VI*, 2015

Refinement and Embellishment

Within the studio research, hyper-realism enriches representation through painterly enhancements. This includes exaggerating the saturation of colour and embellishing overlooked details by refining edge quality or rendered texture. This increase of detail

flirts with implausibility, ironically using a contrived method of painterly representation to interpret a presumably natural subject. From this process of painterly embellishment, representation becomes less literal and prone to distortion, using illusion to reimagine what the human eye overlooks (K. Hay, 2017). What emerges is the way in which trends of aesthetic perfectionism are commonly reflected within food imaging practices, and how this normalises abstracted modes of vision. Thus, intensifying detail disrupts the familiarity of the original image, which makes the food appear more hyper-real. Refining the image in this way is akin to the control of food styling, which manipulates illusion to provide an otherwise unattainable perspective. So, hyper-realism has not been used to mimic the visual draw of food imaging, but renders its tropes visible, exploring the delicate slippage between the tangible and virtual realms of food. This includes the visual threshold, where the real and imaginary become increasingly indistinguishable and the saturation of visual information becomes a preferred reality substitute (Baudrillard, 1990).

Three small studies were completed which explore how far visual aesthetics could be exaggerated through hyper-realistic painting until they become unappealing (Figures 48, 49 and 50). This was initially tested by photographing food in the lighting studio for painterly translation. Food was styled and presented as part of a hyperbolic space, where visual exaggeration was prioritised over creating a convincing illusion. This included constructing unusual environments with reflective surfaces and bright multi-coloured backgrounds to build up a saturation of visual information. Once translated into paint, this was intended to resemble a visually exclusive space that was purely sybaritic. This also aimed to reveal how degrees of control exerted during its initial

construction and hyper-realistic translation are expressed through visual overstatement and high levels of aesthetic mediation.

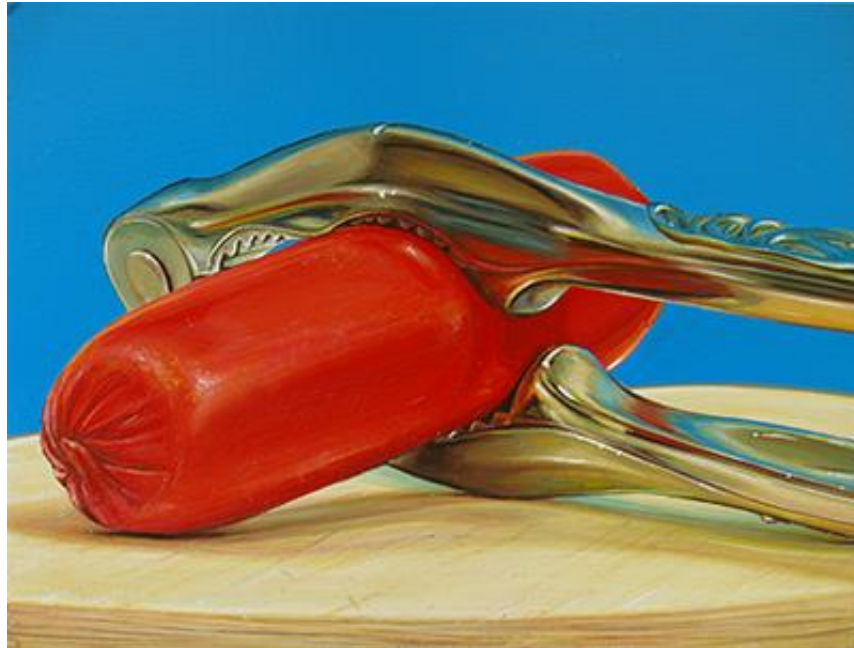


Figure 48 - Nathan Taylor, *Study VII*, 2015

These studies were important in identifying how painted hyper-realism interprets food, including how such representation could both engage and detach the viewer. Within these studies, hyper-realism becomes both a lure and a barrier, where excessive rendering quickly runs the risk of becoming distracting, rather than contemplative. The tight rendering of hyper-realism has been adopted within all the painting-based research, but takes on a distinctly anxious appearance within these studies because of the already designed source imagery. A build-up of stylised visual complexity, coupled with tight compositional framing, thus produces a degree of visual uncertainty, rather than awareness around current food imaging practices.



Figure 49 - Nathan Taylor, *Study VIII*, 2015



Figure 50 - Nathan Taylor, *Study IX*, 2015

My subsequent reflections did however identify that presentation and proximity are important in raising broader ideas of food image consumption and visual negotiation.

Being deliberately small in scale, with the food rendered slightly over life size, visually frames the food as close and intimate, as if the painting itself could be consumed. Displaying the studies as a cluster, as opposed to individually, alludes to the multifaceted arrangement of visual information within online platforms (Figure 51). Here, images sit adjacent to one another and are visually negotiated as part of a larger plane, with the individual paintings appearing to compete for attention and jostle for position.



Figure 51 - Nathan Taylor, *Study VII, VIII and IX (Installation view)*, 2015

A fourth small study adopts a subtler aesthetic approach, focusing on less theatrical strategies (Figure 52). To reflect more recognisable food imaging strategies, I sourced this image online, rather than staging and shooting it myself. The image was chosen for its softer aesthetic, created through more typical styling and photographic tropes,

such as short depth of focus, precision plating and an inviting compositional space. Through its translation into paint, I tried to reattain the subtle characteristics of the image. Hyper-realism was therefore used to uphold aesthetics already present within its representation, such as light and colour, with only subtle improvements to details, such as reflections and texture. This establishes that paint can better question the familiarity of contemporary food imaging, without always relying on overstated, fabricated or clichéd tropes.



Figure 52 - Nathan Taylor, *Study XIII*, 2016

The intention of *Study XIII* was to be less visually anxious than the other small studies, by using paint to retain aspects of sensuality that drew the gaze within the original photograph. However, from this approach, paint has inadvertently created a semblance of the original image, or a photographic echo. Re-presenting a recognisable space of

contemporary food imaging through re-contextualisation thus creates a reflective space to question routine imaging practices.

Just like design and styling within food imaging, viewer engagement is drawn in through hyper-realistic painting by refining various aesthetics qualities of representation. Through this series of small studies, I have identified that situating food in a garish or lurid composition do not necessarily equate to increased visual engagement. In fact, observations would suggest that a delicate or understated approach with purposive painterly embellishments and embellishments, can result in a more personalised viewer experience. This includes a recognition of how subtly shifting the aesthetics of food imaging between mediums can result in a more contemplative examination and provide better understanding of how mastery controls the image. Here, the power of the image lies in the application of knowledge and the demonstration of skill to effectively govern what is visually concealed and revealed.

Ritual and Control

As a creative process, hyper-realism is structured and executed according to ritual. My engagement through hyper-realism is certainly no different and mirrors how the process of design and styling are meticulously employed to control the image. This includes sifting through dozens of food items to find an exemplary specimen or photographing a dish multiple times, with slight angle or lighting variations, to get the perfect shot. Other rituals include adjusting images through post-production, where colour and light balance can be adjusted or imperfections carefully airbrushed out. Within hyper-realism these rituals are defined through the slow application of painterly layers, where

information becomes both masked and revealed. This starts with the process of drawing up an image using mathematical calculations and precisely measuring pencil marks down to a quarter of a millimetre. This is followed by masking the work (in the reverse order to which it will be painted), using layers of tape to disassemble and isolate individual elements of the image. The painting process then retraces this masking process, following a strict pattern and order through to its completion by painting a small section, removing a small piece of tape and then moving on to the next. This creative process has evolved out of a pursuit of perfection and echoes contemporary aspirations that are swayed by the seductiveness of the unattainable, as well as a desire for personal autonomy (Foster, 1993).

As identified under the image framework of mastery, contemporary food imaging shares these concerns and - similar to painting - offers a level of empowerment through control. Having a sense of control over contemporary existence, even if it is tied to a process of consuming illusion, allows a space for personal significance to survive within visual excess (Baudrillard, 1990). The rituals of hyper-realistic painting have also become a mechanism to decode and manage the saturation and complexities of popular visual information (Chase, 1975). This was evident during the completion of *Untitled III* (Figure 32), where the intricacies and layering of food within the original image had to be carefully untangled. Using Photoshop, each visual element, including bits of food, shadows and reflections, was decoded by cutting away at the image to establish how it has been assembled. This process resolved how the image could be reconstructed in paint, including planning the exact sequence of the ritual. On completion, this fastidious and ultimately time-consuming process provides governance and a sense

that even the most elaborately styled image has the potential to be mastered and re-depicted through paint.

Like high-end food imaging, hyper-realism relies on precision and technique to fabricate an outcome that effectively seduces the viewer. In this sense, the mastery of hyper-realism seduces through a demonstration of painterly skill, where the viewer can feel reassured through high levels of image mediation. Through a demonstration of knowledge, the painting becomes a space both to exhibit and admire control and dedication. The meticulous rendering and minute detail of hyper-realism becomes a demonstration, not only of skill, but also of investment. This can be admired within the mastery of each painting, as well as against the time dedicated to the slow development of personal skills. As such, the familiarity of what is being depicted as extraordinary is re-framed, where details are bolstered and no longer overlooked. The commitment and display of labour suggests that these details, and hence the image, have significance.

The painterly process of hyper-realism becomes a ritualistic practice of deconstruction and re-fabrication, breaking the visual content of the image up into smaller, more manageable sections before its careful reconstruction. The interpretation of food through paint in this way can be seen as trying to compensate for the anxiety of pre-existing loss that follows the futile pursuit for the unattainable. In this sense, hyper-realism attempts to fabricate a sense of security by obsessively dominating over perfection presented within food imaging. The ritual of paint can therefore be seen as having fetishistic traits (Foster, 1993).

Hyper-realism has the potential to capture this tension of pursuing control within the digital culture - shifting between being rational and impractical, admired and dismissed - while at the same time serving to protect, conceal, deceive and reveal. An example can be seen in *Untitled II* (Figure 33), where the spontaneity of the digitally manipulated composition seems at odds with the laborious ritual that underpins its hyper-realistic interpretation. This appears contradictory and suggests that, despite the work's apparent directness, something is either being masked or concealed from the viewer. In this sense, the tedious formalities of hyper-realism appear to stifle the inviting space of contemporary food imaging.

Pursuit of Perfection

The ritualistic process of hyper-realistic painting closely resembles a key driving force within visual food culture, the pursuit of unattainable perfection. The natural tendency of paint to resist perfection becomes a key seductive quality, the ongoing search for painterly exactitude underpinning its addictive charm. Unique to hyper-realism, compared with food imaging, is that painting represents an original encounter. Here, mastery is observed directly through an object, as opposed to vicariously through a photo. The tangibility of the experience of the painted object carries the trace of my direct engagement, and draws parallels between the control and perfection captured within the original image and its meticulous rendering in paint. This can be seen within *Study XII (Dessert)* of the *Three-Course Meal* suite (Figure 45). Each element of the image has received equal painterly investment; every minute texture and shadow is carefully replicated. This attention to detail demonstrates my acute appreciation for the

subtle complexities that make up the image, but also a desire to apprehend the success of its visual perfection.

Examining perfection represented within contemporary food imaging has become both an inspiration for studio research and a permanent reminder of an unachievable ideal. Hyper-realism becomes a vehicle in which to channel these conflicting traits of perfectionism, where technical and paint mastery is a vehicle for praise. The medium of paint, however, presents a doubled-edged sword, where invested labour reflects both my achievements as well as my limitations. For me, the pursuit of mastery is addictive. It is from this obsession, driven by perfectionism, that both substance and disappointment is bred. A compulsion to pursue perfection will ultimately lead to dissatisfaction, but stubborn determination and obsessive working still show the potential for painting to capture a unique visual energy (Gelernter, 2001).

A similar pursuit of perfection is present within the mastery embodied in Dutch still life of the seventeenth century (Foster, 1993). Here, food is rendered in relentless detail, using painted illusion to create an impenetrable surface where it can be forever preserved. Artistic dedication shown through a pursuit of perception is representative of an acute awareness that the depiction of food can be seen as a cultural marker. Here, meticulous rendering plays an important visual role, both in the individual elements of food and the surface of the painting. A fascination towards surface, both for myself as the artist and for the viewer, is not derived from creating the illusion of perfection, but from its capacity to protect visual content from decay (Baudrillard, 1988). In this sense, painting helps to protect the unattainable ideal of contemporary food imaging, where

accessing the window of limitless opportunity relies on maintaining the surface of perfection.

By building up a rendered surface, hyper-realism reveals that frontality is a common compositional device used within contemporary food imaging; perspectival illusion situates objects within a deliberately shallow space and they appear to be pushed forward at the viewer. Like the assemblages within historical Dutch still life painting, food becomes curated, using surface to describe a world that is perceived through objects (Barthes, 1972b). I have explored this paradox within food imaging so that the viewer is drawn in by seductive visual tropes, but simultaneously pushed away by the painting's capacity to reverse the gaze, using the strategy of hyper-realism to shift how space and depth is read. An example can be seen in *Untitled I* (Figure 34), where hyper-realistic rendering implies space, but simultaneously flattens it out. Rendering the food in this way aims to give the illusion of depth, so that the food appears to protrude from the surface. However, treating each painted element with equal veracity has crafted a uniform surface, where the suggestion of depth quickly collapses on close inspection.

This suggests that digital images remain in flux and can simultaneously be perceived as objective and subjective, autonomous and controlled, natural and constructed. The studio research controls the extent to which these dualisms are visually revealed to the viewer, suggesting that hyper-realistic figuration can question visual consumption habits by drawing out abstracted modes of contemporary perception captured through the photograph (Peariso, 2013).

Conclusion

Within the studio research, hyper-realism has been applied to question how representation differs when presented through paint and photography. This includes exploring how design and styling within both mediums can mediate visual information by controlling what is concealed or revealed to the viewer. For example, within high-end food imaging, styling augments the visual aesthetics of food through processes of transforming and abstracting food. Within painting, styling stems from using the medium's physicality to refine the visual traits of the photograph through gesture, glazing, saturation and detail.

Despite its capacity to capture illusion, hyper-realism remains a painted object. Subsequently, its realism is looked at, rather than through, as with a photograph. As such, the hyper-realistic interpretation of photographic realism becomes a painting of the photograph as sign, rather than a painting of its referent. Using hyper-realism within studio research has confirmed how the mastery and perfectionism that underpins digital photographic representation is unable to be replicated through paint (K. Hay, 2017).

The relentless pursuit of perfection through painted hyper-realism reflects this seduction of the unattainable found within food imaging, as well as a personal desire for reassurance gained through the demonstration of my expertise. Like the original photo-realists, I have used hyper-realism to draw awareness towards the curated perfection captured through photographic illusion, using a sense of detachment built from painterly translation, to comment on its assumed objectiveness. The language of representation is thus turned on itself, amplifying surface frontality to reveal how the

familiar and inviting space of food imaging is controlled through the precision of mastery.

Within high-end food imaging, the adoption of abstract aesthetics is a deliberate strategy used as a visual lure, used to visualise the promise of an exotic experience. Any uncertainty brought about by the visually unfamiliar can be mitigated by knowing the food has been heavily mediated and subject to degrees of control and authority. This is the same with hyper-realism, where the presence of mastery helps to visually navigate the unknown. This unique combination of visual obscurity and conceptual abstraction, brought about by challenging familiar culinary territory, produces a paradoxical situation where the viewer is both engaged and estranged simultaneously. This will be explored further in the next chapter under the frame of innovation, where digitally expanded photographs have been used to explore a desire for augmented modes of vision within online food imaging.

Chapter 7: Innovation

Introduction

The image frame of innovation is used to examine unique forms of online media and the digital evolution of the photograph. This includes how photography now occupies an expanded space that uses digital manipulation to bend conventional visual parameters. Under this frame, both digital media and high-end food imaging are used to determine that innovative strategies visualise contemporary aspirations and shift perceptions around food. Within online media this can be seen within the digital merging of photography and video. Studio research has employed imaging practices exclusive to digital media to investigate the visually eccentric presentations of high-end food imaging. This includes focusing on the cinemagraph to foreground a sense of the ‘digital uncanny’ - the manipulation of images to allow the aesthetic possibilities of the illogical, which would otherwise have escaped attention, to disrupt our visual relationship to everyday experience (Bering-Porter, 2014).

This chapter discusses incorporating visual abstraction into the aesthetics of high-end food imaging to disrupt perceptions. Seamless looping and de-contextualising gesture through stillness and movement are then discussed through studio work based on the cinemagraph. This chapter concludes by reflecting on developments within digital media and its effect on our relationship to food images. This includes the influence of new imaging vehicles on visual consumption by fashioning a visually exclusive space through digital alterations.

Visual Abstraction

Within high-end food imaging, visual abstraction is used to increase attention and amplify engagement, constructing extravagant visual displays that exhibit high levels of creativity to the point of absurdity. This is evidenced through the large number of likes and comments for online food posts with unusually styled dishes. By de-familiarising the broader concept of food through controlled visual abstraction, food imaging begins to expand its metaphoric language beyond normal frames. This includes food imaging incorporating the visual tropes and creative devices of fine art. This is identified through the deliberate disruption of visual elements by exaggerating gesture, texture and form. By applying these visual devices, expectations around the familiar are challenged.



Figure 53 - *Simplistic_Food*, Instagram Image, 2016

An example of broadening culinary awareness by shifting perceptions can be seen within an image taken from the Instagram feed *Simplistic_Food* (Figure 53), which showcases a visually animated dessert that is unrestrained by its plate. The use of colour is unusual in both its intensity and hue. Despite the apparent randomness in the application of the purple sauce, these splash-based gestures help to visually connect all the elements. The composition seems to shift between being disciplined and unruly, intensifying the playful and exotic mood of the dish. In this sense, the indulgent and expressed creative flair within the image encourages speculation about exciting possible future exploits in food.

Common to the image frame of innovation, a sense of aspiration is aligned with more unusual and daring visualisations of food. High-end food imaging becomes a pertinent example of contemporary modes of perception (Nochlin, 1968), which is also suggestive of how contemporary society craves visual reminders of the unattainable. As such, the disruption of food through innovative imaging tropes becomes symbolic of the quest for understanding through processes of subjective interpretation, where visualising the intangible or impossible can increase its appeal.

Cinemagraphic Research

The cinemagraph has been adopted in my studio research to explore how far implausibility can sustain engagement within high-end food imaging. A suite of eight cinemagraphs was made to reflect high-end food imaging aesthetics, with each work designed around images found online. Image selection was guided by similar criteria

to those used for the painting compositions.²¹ Curated from an archive of found images, they were chosen to represent a spectrum of key visual tropes, as well as to sit in aesthetic congruity. This included the use of unusual or exotic ingredients, artistic plating techniques and interesting props or plates. Formal attributes were also considered, including use of colour, line, texture and scale. Finally, a range of photographic tropes was included, including compositional framing, angle and depth of focus.

Typically viewed as an alternative to still photographic images online, the cinemagraph becomes a speculative and novel vehicle to visually examine high-end food imaging. Adapting the genre to fit within a cinemagraphic space included isolating its visual tropes through animated gesture. Within this digital space, high end-food imaging can be further augmented, so that plausibility becomes secondary to spectacle. The cinemagraph's visual disruption of a cogent photographic space echoes the seductiveness of the peculiar and unattainable, key tropes that underpin the image frame of innovation.

Prepping, plating and performing

Unlike the painting-based studio research, where appropriated images were selected solely on visual aesthetics (regardless of how elaborate), images considered for the cinemagraphic compositions had to allow for my capacity to recreate the dish and

²¹ See page 85 for image selection processes for paintings *Untitled I, II & III*. Also see page 106 for image selection processes for paintings within the *Three-Course Meal*.

convincingly incorporate movement. Therefore, it was key to formulate credible ways to animate high-end food imaging, as well as build my knowledge and skills around various cooking techniques. Unsurprisingly, recipes do not habitually accompany high-end food images; the photograph only services visual promotion. Reconstructing these dishes therefore became a process of trial and error, where unknown or unattainable food items, due to their exotic nature, had either to be substituted or replicated with other items. An example of this was painting a slice of radish to mimic the internal markings of candy-striped beetroot. As part of this research I had to learn new cooking techniques, such as making an ice drop dessert enclosure, spun sugar, candy hoops, raindrop cakes and balsamic pearls. I also became skilled in molecular gastronomy techniques, including reverse spherification and the preparation of foams, mousses and gels. Finally, I researched common presentation techniques, including garnishing, sauce-based plating tricks and using dry ice.

Part of designing compositions that could be made into cinemagraphs included experimenting with varying forms of movement, such as pouring, bubbling and dripping liquids, and incorporating steam, wind, smoke and flames. Most important was determining how these movements could be manipulated into a seamless loop. More often than not, these were hard to capture in a non-linear way, each movement being inconsistent and organic. The only way to compensate for this unpredictability was to shoot each composition multiple times, repeating the action over and over in the hope that an identifiable snippet of suitable video would emerge during post-production. This highlighted how, in order to fabricate a convincing loop, the natural tendency of each movement needs to be carefully mediated. It also revealed why cinemagraphic movement takes on a mechanical or uncanny appearance.

Research, experimentation and preparation prior to constructing each dish typically took up to a week. Plating to a satisfactory standard for a shoot could take several hours, and rarely resolved itself without incident on the first attempt.²² Each shoot also needed to be completed during the lifespan of the plated dish, meaning that once a composition had been prepped, there was only a short window before the dish began to melt, dissolve, crumble or collapse. This pressure directly reflects both a working kitchen environment and, more specifically, the parameters of shooting high-production food images, including all the considerations of framing, lighting, styling and design, not to mention activating the ‘performance’ of the dish through movement. Shoots typically had to be conducted in under an hour and consistently became an intense session that was overshadowed by misbehaving food, unforeseen mishaps and uncooperative technologies. After successfully negotiating these concerns, the amount of time used within each completed cinemagraph never exceeded several seconds.

Time invested in planning, constructing, choreographing and post-producing each work easily resembles the labours that underpin high-production contemporary food imaging seen online. This represents time consigned to the design, styling and production of each image, which is masked behind curated perfection. Hyper-realistic painting mirrors this construction of perfection, where labour and planning is simultaneously

²² An example of such incidents included food items refusing to stay in position and typically slipping or falling. This inevitably disrupted the rest of the plated dish by either polluting the clarity of liquids or causing a domino effect of collapsing food. This often had to be resolved by using pins or other types of adhesives to hold the food in place. Other examples include mousses, gels or agar jelly melting or having odd and unpredictable reactions to other food items. This usually required a dish to be completely reconstructed, with key elements having to be re-prepped along with ingredient substitutions.

present and disguised. Similarly, time spent producing a cinemagraph is masked behind various analogue and digital techniques that make the image congenial to visual consumption.

Preservation through the loop

Similar to labour, time becomes invested, captured, used, as well as masked. Capturing movement through the loop creates a temporal paradox, which allows the length of each work to become both compressed and extended simultaneously (Ross, 2006). This is highlighted within the cinemagraph through the loop's seamless transition, allowing gesture to appear autonomous. This can be seen within *Untitled 3 (Strawberry Froth)* (Figure 54), which depicts a carefully plated dessert of a decorated ice-cream sphere in a bed of strawberry froth, garnished with a candy-hoop and gold leaf. Animation is captured here with the use of dry ice, where vapour appears to cascade endlessly off the plate. Here, the loop enables dry ice to exist beyond the lifespan of its natural resources and to appear self-sustaining. Consequently, time appears preserved. However, it also resembles a state of contradiction, where time advances but never reaches a destination (Bering-Porter, 2014).

Despite this visual conflict, time suspended within the cinemagraph appears conserved rather than trapped. Free from lineal constraints, where time inevitably would find resolution, the seamless loop dissolves the visual pressure of certainty, refocusing attention on the beauty of a perpetual present. From the loop, time becomes another choreographed trope within the image and allows a sense of immediacy to be cast in perpetuity (Bering-Porter, 2014). As such, the loop becomes visually predictable and

a focus for the image. Despite appearing autonomous, the predictability of the loop provides a sense of visual security, where any uncertainty of future events becomes foreseeable and thus comprehensible.



Figure 54 - Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 3 (Strawberry Froth)*, 2017

Shifting focus to the loop frees the image from the requisites of connotation and narrative typical to most food imaging. This reconsiders the digital photograph as both fixed and ongoing, and imagines its relationship to time as both a continuation and the ephemerality of the present (Chiarini, 2016). Disrupting expectations around how time is visually represented draws out a sense of reassurance. In this sense, the loop becomes representative of conserving time.

This can be seen within *Untitled 1 (Pink Fish)* (Figure 55), through the endless pouring of a soup-based pink liquid. In its static format this composition reflects an innovative visual aesthetic common to high-end food imaging. This includes ambiguous foodstuffs, asymmetrical plating and an emphasis on creative garnishing. These tropes frame the dish as exotic, unfamiliar and ornamental.



Figure 55 - Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 1 (Pink Fish)*, 2017

Once animated, the stream of liquid appears perpetual, yet the level within the bowl remains unchanged. This becomes a metaphor for the perceived endless supply of luxury suggested within most food imaging, where superfluous consumption is inconsequential and without depletion. This cinemagraph captures the aspirational ideals of high-end food imaging, whilst simultaneously providing reassurance about an eternal luxury. It is also intended to become a space to satisfy a digital desire for the immediate, as well as a need for stability brought about by preservation.

De-contextualising gesture through stillness and movement

In addition to the loop, a sense of preservation is visualised through the amalgamation of stillness and movement. Capturing the presence of stasis and movement simultaneously is what defines the cinemagraph as an expanded photograph. By contrast, the photograph, typically defined by stillness, is able to seize a single movement from a passing period in time. However, it is not until a small amount of animation is introduced that this sense of stillness becomes visible. Where the photograph captures a past event, the cinemagraph captures a present which is perpetually unfolding.



Figure 56 - Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 7 (Butterfly Pea Tea)*, 2018

Within my studio research, compositions deliberately investigated movements that were understated and almost imperceptible, as well as those taking a more central role and being intentionally overt. This difference of approach can be seen in a comparison of *Untitled 6* and *Untitled 7* (Figures 56 and 57).

In *Untitled 7 (Butterfly Pea Tea)*, movement is isolated to the reflected light within the rim of the dish. It is subtle and could even be missed at first glance. By contrast, movement within *Untitled 6 (Poached Pear)* is more obvious, as the entire background endlessly twinkles. By shifting degrees of movement, I explore how various states of stillness and movement affect the enticement of the image, as well as influence levels of prolonged engagement.



Figure 57 - Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 6 (Poached Pear)*, 2018

In addition to movement, varying degrees of stillness were also explored. In most of the cinemagraphs developed for this project, movement was focused on a section of food. An example can be seen in *Untitled 2 (Mushroom and Lotus Root)* (Figure 58), which depicts a mushroom broth that bubbles sporadically. This centralised movement focuses attention on the plating of the food and how the broth forms a connecting element. However, stillness was also explored through the food, where only the background changes. This can be seen in both *Untitled 6 (Poached Pear)* and *Untitled*

7 (*Butterfly Pea Tea*), where the focus is directed towards the food, its apparent motionlessness contrasting with the rest of the composition. This is further emphasised in *Untitled 6 (Poached Pear)*, where the liquid dripping from the spoon appears frozen in time. These various combinations of stillness and movement create a delicate balance between subtleness and exaggeration, each suggesting a visual counterpoint for the other.



Figure 58 - Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 2 (Mushroom and Lotus Root)*, 2017

By representing varying states of stillness and movement within food, gestures become de-contextualised, liberated from a predictable state and subsequently augmented. As such, the gesture within each work becomes a form of refined abstraction that can be measured as a qualitative experience (Uhlin, 2014). The stillness and movement within the cinemagraph liberates gesture from connotation, which gifts the viewer a novel sense of self-awareness (Chiarini, 2016). Using de-contextualisation further exaggerates the innovative tropes typical to high-end food imaging by deliberately disrupting the image's referent and verisimilitude. This suggests that visual

engagement is not diminished as a consequence of presenting implausibility and, in fact, can work to increase it.

The uncanny

The automated gesture captured within the cinemagraph contradicts our expectation that inanimate objects move independently of human interaction.²³ However, this sense of the uncanny does not necessarily stem from the stillness of a photo springing to life, but rather from how the motion of each cinemagraph subverts a familiar action into a mechanical gesture (Bering-Porter, 2014). This can be seen within *Untitled 5 (Assorted Gastronomy)* (Figure 59), which depicts an assortment of exotic and peculiar foods theatrically presented against a black background.

Within this cinemagraph the food largely remains static, except for a shot glass of flaming layered liquids. The flickering flame has been captured to initially appear natural, although slightly repetitive. In presenting the flame as an endless loop, my aim was for its motion to eventually appear mechanised and artificial. Here, the isolated gesture becomes almost obsessive, inciting a re-evaluation of its detail (Bering-Porter, 2014; Miltner et al., 2017). After prolonged viewing, the incessant pulse of the flame appears to contradict natural behaviour; it becomes strange, just as a repeatedly speaking a word makes it sound unfamiliar. The organic movement of the loop soon reveals its inflexibility - initially entrancing, but eventually predictable.

²³ Mechanical automata of the eighteenth century and optical-based devices of the nineteenth century enthralled viewers by providing a glimpse into the mystical realm of animation. Cinemagraphs likewise manage to visualise our possible trans-human condition through the evolution of digital technologies (Chiarini, 2016; Usselman, 2017).



Figure 59 - Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 5 (Assorted Gastronomy)*, 2017

It is from this predictability, where movement occurs as if on autopilot, that a suspicion of mechanical intervention emerges (Bergson, 1911; Bering-Porter, 2014); in this case, through digital manipulation. If each cinemagraph is viewed over a prolonged period, the transition from organic motion to automation can emerge as comical. Sitting adjacent to the more serious design of high-end food imaging, humour has the potential to become a corrective measure. In this sense, the loop act to caution against digital mediations, especially when they ‘become too automatic and begin to resemble caricatures ... of life itself’ (Bering-Porter, 2014, p. 183).

The uncanny is also present within the visual construction of each cinemagraph. This has appeared both inadvertently, as the result of some gastronomic skills being beyond my capability, and as planned, when food has been arranged to look curious. This draws out the abstract nature of high-end food constructions and the spectacle of disrupting food aesthetics. This can also be seen within *Untitled 5 (Assorted*

Gastronomy) (Figure 59), where miniature fungi appear to sprout from cream-topped jelly, strawberries are square, and asparagus stands erect. The deliberate collating of these items emphasises individual oddities; it also replaces the standard plate as the reflective surface.



Figure 60 - Nathan Taylor, *Untitled 4 (Smoked Panna Cotta)*, 2017

Here, the food is clearly designed for visual consumption and styled to appear performative. A sense of the uncanny can also be seen within *Untitled 4 (Smoked Panna Cotta)* (Figure 60), where the food's fragile construction appears to be deteriorating. This draws out the faux qualities in its appearance, including leaking

fluorescent liquid and a melted isomalt disk. The dessert becomes unnerving, suggesting a high-end dish that has tried too hard and now wavers on the edge of failure.

Conclusion

With no opportunity to identify a beginning or end, the cinemagraph reorients time away from chronology, replacing the referent of the image with visual contradictions and uncanniness (Chiarini, 2016). As such, the cinemagraph can be seen as liberating the photograph from narrative and thus providing a potentially objective space to reevaluate the prevalent use of choreographed exaggeration within contemporary visual media (Hagman, 2012). It is from this visually exclusive space that innovative styles of image construction appear to flourish, especially within high-end food imaging, where the peculiarity of manipulations match abstracted styling. By isolating specific elements within an image through curated movement, the cinemagraph foregrounds how formal visual elements are a primary concern for contemporary imaging practices. Moreover, the cinemagraph reveals how the overt augmentation of these elements draws out a sense of the uncanny, which continues to be admired within popular networks.

As a unique form of online media, the cinemagraph explores the photograph as a digitally expanded space, where contemporary aspirations can be visualised through the unattainable. Through the innovative strategies of high-end food images, studio research has shown the strength of the cinemagraph to shift perceptions and promote awareness around the aesthetic evolution of food images. This includes de-contextualising exotic or transmuted food items through stillness and looped movement

to reflect a shift in our connection to food, as seen in the vertical compositions of *Untitled 3 (Strawberry Froth)* and *Untitled 4 (Smoked Panna Cotta)* (Figures 54 and 60). This strategy was adopted to reflect the influence of digital technologies on framing contemporary imaging; in this case, using a portable device, such as a mobile phone, to switch the orientation of an image.

Presenting digital media and painting together provides a unique opportunity to reflect on contemporary image currency. A dual-medium approach reflects the growing diversity of textures currently used within online visual communications, as well as the historical connections of food imaging and the digital practices that have driven its recent evolution.

The final chapter will discuss these ideas further and conclude the research findings, by looking at how the use of contrasting mediums reveals a transition from analogue to digital processes. It will also consider a growing slippage between artistic and online engagement, and argue that the digital climate has democratised the performative space of imaging, so that it assumes a more interactive role.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Within the digital spectacle of contemporary food imaging, observational analysis has identified how design and styling elevate the representation of food above documentation. Choreographed visual devices, including framing, embellishment, lighting and exaggeration, are now commonly applied to actively engage the viewer and draw the gaze. By orchestrating visual elements, such as mood, tone and narrative, food imaging can be seen as representing cultural desires and contemporary attitudes. Modes of creative disruption employed to activate these elements within contemporary food imaging are recognisable strategies used in the visual arts and demonstrate their role in constructing significance. This research has established a direct lineage between contemporary food imaging and historical painting movements, including Dutch still life from the seventeenth century and Post-Impressionism from the late nineteenth century. Both historical painting and modern food imaging suggest feelings of aspiration or reassurance through visual strategies and creative tropes. This is reflected in the style, motivations that underpin each of the identified image frameworks: entertainment, authenticity, mastery and innovation. The defining feature of each frame includes, visual exaggeration, fabricating a sense of sincerity, demonstrating skill and a fascination with the exotic. These distinctive visual traits have contributed to the examination of visual devices within high-end food imaging, as well as identify any unique aspects derived from food imaging's digital acclimatisation. This includes an acute focus on creative expression by integrating exotic ornamentation that enables images to compete for appraisal within online platforms.

As a consequence of online dissemination, self-sustaining food imaging genres have emerged. A transition away from food imaging solely used to contextualise written content, has subsequently seen an increase in visual consumption and vicarious enjoyment. This is evidenced through the popularity of social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest. As such, the digital space has fostered a visual climate that celebrates the spectacle of styling and normalises the seductiveness of food porn. Moreover, the interactive engagement of digital media online, including rapid image transfer and digital manipulation, suggests that images are used as social assets within popular media communications. Within food media, this presents as a multi-textured space of image exchange, used as a digital extension of social-based food practices. As such, food imaging has established itself as a dynamic currency of cultural display within the online visual economy. This includes engaging with images that both represent social aspirations and visualise the unattainable. Users can define their identity and find personal significance through online actions such as liking, commenting or re-posting.

The contemporary genre of high-end food imaging is an accurate reflection of these current cultural aspirations and reveals that a sense of authenticity is sought by viewing innovative experiences online. The visual tropes of high-end food imaging also suggest that the creative boundaries between food and art are continuing to blur. This is seen within the high production values and digital manipulations of fashion-based food images, as evidenced in this research through the work of Aleksandra Kingo, Maurizio Di Iorio and Jess Bonham. Both genres are underpinned by exaggerated, provocative and abstracted presentation, which is constructed and distributed purely as visual entertainment. The pervasiveness of this embellished style is an example of digital

technologies, such as digital cameras, image editing and online image platforms, stimulating the evolving trajectory of food imaging. Part of this aesthetic expansion includes embracing a sense of the uncanny. It also demonstrates that food is now recognised as a legitimate domain for creative expression.

This is further reflected in the expanding curatorial programming of art institutions and the recent alignment of visual art and fine dining. An example of this can be observed within the exhibition catalogue for *Harvest*, hosted by the Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane and curated dinners hosted by Tate Britain, London as well as the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. The uniting of artistic and culinary cultural domains is representative of society embracing a boutique focus, and, importantly, becoming more accustomed to curated experiences. Here, an expert is engaged to re-present familiar ideas to aid new understanding. For example, this might be to provide an objective reading on the theme of food, as seen through the exhibition *Harvest*, where a diverse approach to programming and the inclusion of multi-media provided numerous perspectives on a familiar topic. Similarities can be drawn between the curatorial practices of art galleries and image-based web feeds, where viewer engagement is directed through a selection of media. In the context of food media, both forms of curation can be seen as catering for current social aspirations, as well as adapting to the digital expectations of the viewer. This includes the multifaceted nature of online engagement, where viewers can participate and interact.

Contextual analysis conducted during this research reveals that a rapid growth within food media has been stimulated by digital technologies. This is demonstrated within the expanding space of contemporary food imaging, which has adopted more

exaggerated and stylised visual tropes. This suggests the importance of critiquing the roles of digital media, design and styling in constructing cultural meaning within contemporary food representations. The rising significance of food imaging across multiple cultural domains, including the creative arts and popular online networks, points to a broad focus on innovative aesthetics that disrupt perceptions around food. Digital interventions have subsequently redefined photographic representation within this genre. This demonstrates a growing taste for the spectacular through augmented visual engagement online, such as the cinemagraph, as a way to meet current social aspirations and reassurances. High-end food imaging also reflects a desire for the unusual, its online popularity indicating a growing democratisation of boutique ideals through increased accessibility. This may include luxury or rare food items, which are presented as exclusive. As a way to visually access the unattainable, high-end food imaging can be defined as a new elite strand of food porn that is distributed for popular consumption through the commodification of desire-based gastronomic experiences and reflects the aspirations of the class conscious looking to align themselves to social distinction.

Studio Research

Studio research has used the four image frameworks of entertainment, authenticity, mastery and innovation to pinpoint the defining attributes of high-end food imaging. This has enabled the studio work to directly analyse how digital technologies and online interactions are shaping our relationship to food images. Each frame has redefined key methodologies as creative processes that resemble the inherent desires of contemporary food imaging, including a need for novelty, originality and personal autonomy. As

such, studio research has provided greater appreciation towards new ways food imaging has shaped broad social engagement within digital and popular cultures by embracing experiential based media.

Under the frame of entertainment, digital manipulations were applied to explore the function of design and styling in the construction of images for visual consumption. Using the medium of paint to reinterpret digital styling, I explored exaggerated representations within food imaging by removing the background and adding painterly gesture. This included amplifying visual aesthetics through increased levels of saturation and detail, which have become normalised by the democratisation of digital technologies. My paintings have investigated the recent adoption of greater visual theatricality within food imaging, including entertainment-based visual strategies of curated intimacy and mannered styling, as well as swapping plausible representation for illusion and a sense of the spectacular.

The frame of authenticity was used to investigate the search for personal significance online. By re-contextualising appropriated images through paint, the studio research has created a space to re-evaluate the role of photographic representation as a means to define personal realities, specifically within routine engagements online. Adopting the process of re-contextualisation has allowed me to question the transience of digital culture. I also explored the search for originality online through a process of appropriation, re-mixing existing visual elements or re-posting content through curated images feeds. Degrees of authenticity were demonstrated through the selection of the images I chose to re-interpret through paint. Authenticity was also investigated through

the physicality of paint, where trace, direct engagement and fabricated pictorial illusion have revealed the difficulty of competing against digital perfection.

The frame of mastery was used to explore the valued traits of perfectionism, control and the demonstration of skill, which are also mirrored within the rituals of hyper-realistic painting. A display of mastery within paint mirrors the heavily mediated representations of food, where a feeling of reassurance is gained from witnessing dominance over something that appears unfamiliar. Painted hyper-realism also questioned the difference between photographic and painted representation, including using mastery to control visual information being presented and read by the viewer. Within the painterly research and in food imaging, a sense of familiarity is controlled through the precision of mastery.

The frame of innovation was used to examine the digital evolution of food imaging and photography's occupation within an expanded space. The cinemagraph exemplifies this expanded space and, through visual abstraction and a sense of the peculiar, is able to capture contemporary aspirations within high-end food imaging. Through seamless looping and de-contextualised gesture, the cinemagraph was used to create a detached pictorial space as a means to reevaluate the ubiquitous choreographing of exaggeration within contemporary food media. Under the frame of innovation, the cinemagraph highlights a new connection to food through digital media, including the increased admiration for the uncanny within popular networks.

Through the visual strategies described, studio work highlights the practice of visual amplification within food imaging to capture an increasing cultural desire for sensorial-

based gastronomic experiences. In a digital era of greater culinary awareness, where exhibiting experience and an understanding of gastronomic sophistication is admired, studio research has illustrated a broader fetishistic proclivity for perfection and control within contemporary food imaging culture.

Presenting and Re-Presenting

Adopting a dual-medium based approach has provided a unique opportunity to reflect on contemporary image currency within food media and the influencing visual aesthetics of digital technologies. By viewing both painting and cinemagraphic research together, a form of medium self-awareness emerges, which aims to create a space to reflect on the differences between the technologies employed (Palmer, 2007). This suggests that there is a slippage between analogue and digital processes within contemporary imaging practices, which enables the combination of seemingly contradictory signifiers of creative investment and time. More importantly, it has enabled the exploration of varying degrees of collapsed and expanded critical distance in the viewing of contemporary images, including an exploration of the influence of the drawn gaze. This has been considered through the different ways representation is interpreted between digital and analogue mediums. For example, a painting is typically looked at, whereas a screen or photograph is looked through. This shift in reading explores the varied modes of image consumption and how the viewer is subsequently put in contact with the world (Bacon, 2016; Walton, 1984).

Presenting different mediums together reflects the multi-layered space of online engagement, where different modes of imaging become part of an expanded space that

is both curated and interactive. Here, painting and the cinemagraph reveal the malleability of the photograph when mediated through digital technologies. This is not necessarily about offering up something entirely different, but instead offering an alternative way of looking at it (Hall, 2010). As such, both mediums can be viewed as a form of creative disruption, creating a space to evaluate the shifting relationships we now have with digital images. This includes online viewing habits of glancing over a saturation of images or gazing at the spectacle. Through studio research, painting and cinemagraphs aim to reverse these patterns and prompt a reinvestment in critical observation. This approach has been pivotal in investigating the evolving space of contemporary food media in which visual technologies have ‘absorbed duration, spatialised time, or contributed to the reign of instantaneity and presentism’ (Ross, 2006, p. 99).

Shifting Time

My studio research suggests that image currency within online food media is perceived and experienced through various signifiers and exchanges of time. This has resulted from each medium representing and exploiting time differently; for example, time invested in creating an image, the length of time spent viewing it, and time itself being manipulated through stasis and motion. Time is also an important component of image styling, where various visual tropes, such as props, will help to imply a time period or specific moment in time. For example, this may include the moment of anticipation felt just before indulging in an elegant feast, or kindling a sense of nostalgia to prompt a fond memory. This may even extend to visualising the excitement of future exploits through presenting the exotic or unattainable. Presenting cinemagraphs and painting

together thus aims to establish a historical connection to food imaging, while also suggesting a future trajectory. Cinemagraphic and painted works have explored the far end of this evolving aesthetic spectrum, where digital mediums and digital manipulation push high-end food imaging into pure spectacle.

As part of this enquiry, the studio research has used re-contextualisation and de-contextualisation to disrupt established perceptions around image currency. For example, the permanence of paint and the labour invested in the process of hyper-realism sit adjacent to the transient lifespan of the rendered digital image. Through seamless looping, the cinemagraph appears to immortalise the image, where time is preserved in an intermediate state, neither past nor future. Within each medium, internal juxtapositions are visually choreographed to isolate movement, as seen most prominently in *Untitled 6 (Poached Pear)* (Figure 57), which draws out an awareness of compositional stillness. Within *Untitled I, II and III* (Figures 34, 33 and 32), the gestural flow of paint makes the meticulously rendered food appear staged and comparatively static.

Viewed in unison, the static nature of paint and the motion of the cinemagraph aim to activate an objective reading of the other, where the similarities and differences between each medium, the interpretation of subject matter and modes of presentation are revealed. As such, each approach becomes a visual counterpoint to the other, exploring linked notions of impermanence, duration and preservation. Alternative representations of time play out across the two mediums and through the suspension of exaggerated gesture. Despite both mediums activating an alternative reading of the other, they also reveal the fabricated intimacy of food imaging and a receding degree

of authenticity within digital culture. This becomes evident in the cinemagraphic works through a peculiar sense of distance, where the novelty of the imaging becomes suspended in perpetual, uncanny repetition. It also begins to surface in the painted works, where the authenticity of artistic engagement appears suppressed by the mannered approach of digital styling. In other words, the intimate space of high-end food imaging becomes disrupted as a result of re-presenting visual tropes through unusual mediums.

Multiple visual approaches have been adopted within the studio work to resemble states of being partially unresolved or in transition. This becomes evident through some of the unreconciled compositional motifs applied, as well as the deliberate combination of contrasting strategies and mediums. For example this can be seen in the subtle movement and infinite loop of the cinemagraphs, the orchestrated marks and gestures in paint, as well as the scribbles in pencil. These visual disruptions allow for a constructive degree of confusion to surface, which signifies the plasticity of the digital image and an ongoing state of flux within image culture. Moreover, it is reminiscent of how contemporary food imaging remains in a perpetual state of visual transformation.

Future Space of Food

There has always been a crossover between the domains of food and art, where creative devices are reflected in popular imaging, but also where food has been adopted as a medium for creative expression. Contextual and studio-based research suggests that these creative parameters will continue to blur, with expanding online food engagement

framing these collaborations as mainstream. The internet will continue to facilitate this evolving space, where ever larger audiences support the emergence of niche food imaging genres. Food has always been used to facilitate social and cultural communication, but online dissemination and digital technologies have allowed the language of food to have visual focus. The growing creative engagement with food to expand the philosophical and theoretical discourse on gastronomic expression establishes an important cross-disciplinary pursuit for future research. This includes exploring creative practice to critique the way food-based understanding is democratised through online networks.

As digital technologies continue to influence our daily routines, it is inevitable that modes of creative disruption will further expand the visual and physical role of food. As more of our lives become digitally augmented - for example, through virtual reality headsets and phone apps that overlay digital rendering on real-time video - it will be important for research to maintain critical focus on how the representation of food is being absorbed into this evolving space. Part of contributing to the philosophical debate around food's digital expansion will be to decode the various ways and means in which future devices disrupt standard modes of food engagement. It may even introduce new modes of creative disruption that push the boundaries of taste and appreciation and stir debates between ethics, food and art.

In many ways, the future space of cooking has already started to unfold, as seen in contemporary practices of molecular gastronomy. This includes challenging expectations around modern cuisine by implementing a multi-sensory dimension to food, which expands its conceptual dimension. As these scientific and creative

approaches are more commonly adopted, we are also likely to see an increase in the integration of digital technologies. This warrants the development of a new theoretical platform that acknowledges and questions digital technologies as a fundamental ingredient within the future evolution of food and its representation and imaging.

Future studio research will continue to investigate this digital conditioning of food. Potential strategies include integrating more digitally driven design-based aesthetics to contemporary food imaging for painterly re-contextualisation. This may include questioning the representational parameters of digital food photography by flattening out compositional elements and extending graphic and schematic sections. Further critiquing the influence of digital manipulation on our evolving visual relationship to contemporary aesthetics will only grow in importance, specifically with rapidly advancing technologies and their increased democratisation. Using creative practice to draw awareness towards these shifts can only contribute to the re-establishment of a tangible presence within an expanding virtual climate. This may also include expanding how painting and digital media are simultaneously presented and possibly visually integrated.

Overall, the research has revealed that digitally manipulated images are catering to a rapidly progressing visual climate. The current speed and volume of image consumption suggests that food imaging is focused on seducing the viewer in the present moment. The studio research has applied exaggerated gesture to foreground how high-end food imaging has adopted this visually sybaritic focus. At the crux of both historical and contemporary food imagining is the lure of the unattainable. This has been explored within studio research through different references to time, signifying

that food imaging presents a past event, but simultaneously offers the promise of future exploits. Despite this visual focus on future innovations, current digital technologies have allowed the visual consumption of these images to become almost instantaneous. This suggests a key shift in our relationship to food images, where the unattainable is closer than ever before. As such, contemporary food imaging still thrives off visualising social aspirations, but has digitally evolved so that it can now be endlessly consumed in the present.

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APPENDICES

Completed Studio Work



Preliminary Study 1, 2015

Acrylic on board

30 x 15 cm



Preliminary Study 2, 2015

Acrylic on board

30 x 15 cm



Preliminary Study 3, 2015

Acrylic on board

30 x 15 cm



Preliminary Study 4, 2015

Acrylic on board

30 x 15 cm



Study V, 2015
Acrylic on board
45 x 50 cm



Study VI, 2015
Acrylic on board
45 x 50 cm



Study VII, 2015
Acrylic on board
15 x 20 cm



Study VIII, 2015
Acrylic on board
18 x 20 cm



Study IX, 2015
Acrylic on board
18 x 20 cm



Study XIII, 2016
Acrylic on board
20 x 15 cm



Study X (Entrée), 2016
Acrylic on board
50 x 45 cm



Study XI (Main Course), 2016
Acrylic on board
50 x 45 cm



Study XII (Dessert), 2017
Acrylic on board
50 x 45 cm



Preliminary Video Study 1 (Melting Icy Pole), 2016
HD Video, 16:9
Infinite loop



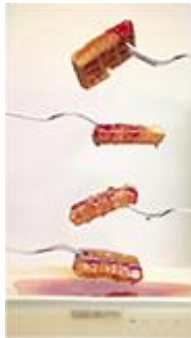
Preliminary Video Study 2 (Spikey Sausage), 2016
HD Video, 16:9
Infinite loop



Preliminary Video Study 3 (Pouring Drink), 2016
 HD Video, 16:9
 Infinite loop



Preliminary Video Study 4 (Burger Bubble), 2016
 HD Video, 16:9
 Infinite loop



Preliminary Video Study 5 (Waffle Dripping), 2016
 HD Video, 16:9
 Infinite loop



Preliminary Video Study 6 (Candle Smoke), 2016
 HD Video, 16:9
 Infinite loop



Preliminary Video Study 7 (Ant), 2016
 HD Video, 16:9
 Infinite loop



Untitled I, 2017
 Acrylic on board
 94.5 x 85cm



Untitled II, 2017
Acrylic on board
94.5 x 85cm



Untitled III, 2017
Acrylic on board
94.5 x 85cm



Preliminary Video Study 8 (Green), 2017
HD Video, 16:9
Infinite loop



Untitled 1 (Pink Fish), 2017
HD Video, 16:9
Infinite loop



Untitled 2 Mushroom Soup), 2017
HD Video, 16:9
Infinite loop



Untitled 3 (Strawberry Froth), 2017
HD Video, 16:9
Infinite loop



Untitled 4 (Smoked Panna Cotta), 2017

HD Video, 16:9

Infinite loop



Untitled 5 (Assorted Gastronomy), 2017

HD Video, 16:9

Infinite loop



Untitled 6 (Poached Pear), 2018

HD Video, 16:9

Infinite loop



Untitled 7 (Butterfly Pea Tea), 2018

HD Video, 16:9

Infinite loop

List of Submitted Work

Study VII, 2015

Acrylic on board

15 x 20cm

Study VIII, 2015

Acrylic on board

18 x 20cm

Study IX, 2015

Acrylic on board

18 x 20cm

Study XIII, 2016

Acrylic on board

20 x 15cm

Study X (Entrée), 2016

Acrylic on board

50 x 45cm

Study XI (Main Course), 2016

Acrylic on board

50 x 45cm

Study XII (Dessert), 2017

Acrylic on board

50 x 45cm

Untitled I, 2017

Acrylic on board

94.5 x 85cm

Untitled II, 2017

Acrylic on board

94.5 x 85cm

Untitled III, 2017

Acrylic on board

94.5 x 85cm

Untitled 1 (Pink Fish), 2017

HD Video, 16:9

Infinite loop

Untitled 3 (Strawberry Froth), 2017

HD Video, 16:9

Infinite loop

Untitled 4 (Smoked Panna Cotta), 2017

HD Video, 16:9

Infinite loop

Untitled 5 (Assorted Gastronomy), 2017

HD Video, 16:9

Infinite loop

Untitled 6 (Poached Pear), 2018

HD Video, 16:9

Infinite loop

Untitled 7 (Butterfly Pea Tea), 2018

HD Video, 16:9

Infinite loop

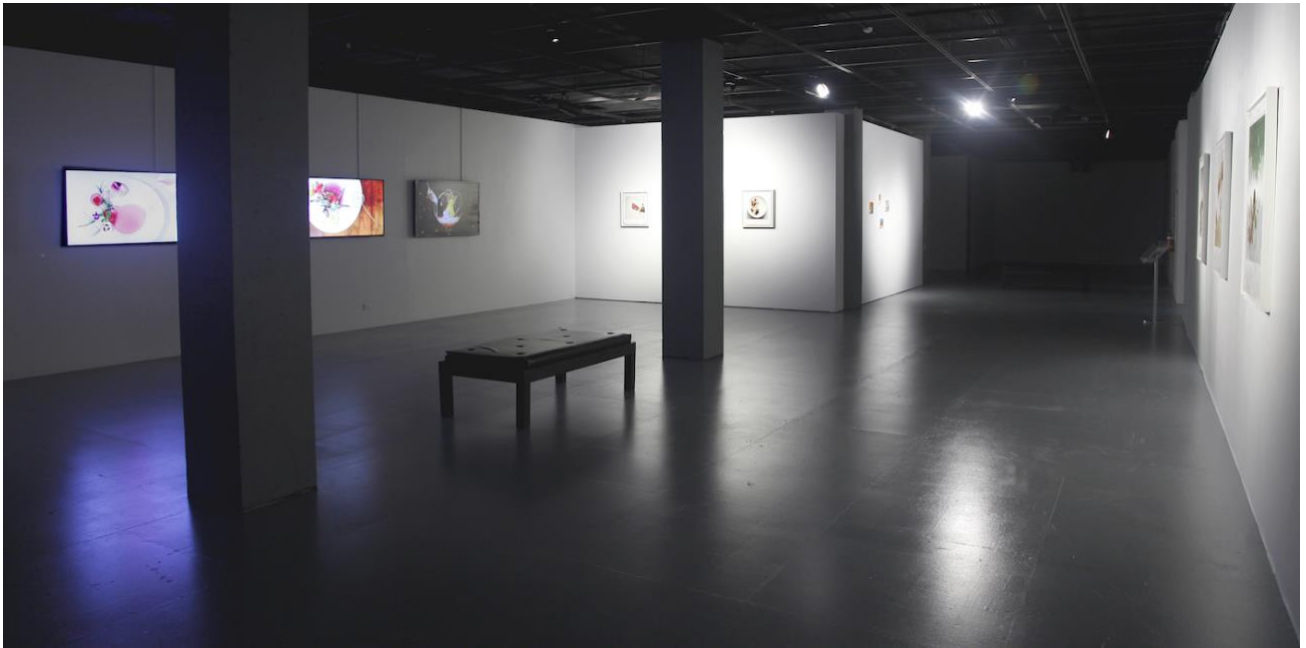
Examination Exhibition Installation Views



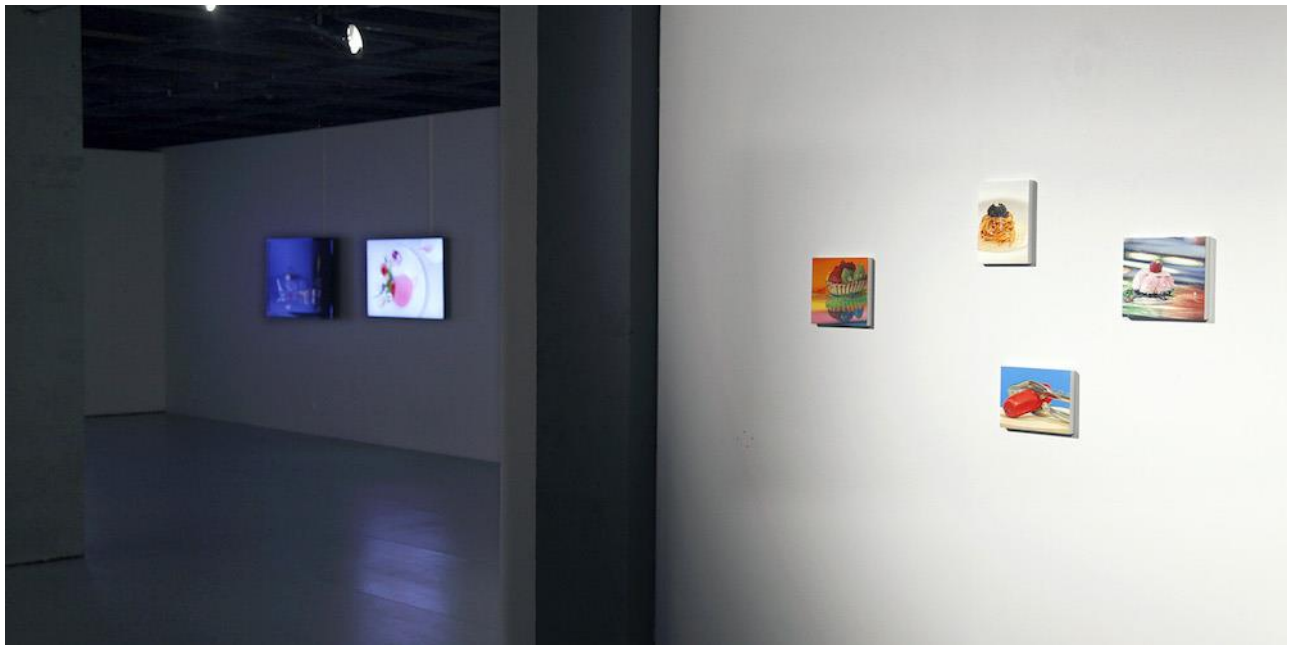
Installation Shot 1: Untitled 4, 3, 4, 1, 6 & 7 (from left)



Installation Shot 2: Study X, XI & XII (left wall), Study IX, XIII, VIII, VII (right wall)



Installation Shot 3: Untitled 1, 6 & 7 (left wall), Study X & XIII (middle left wall), Study IX, XIII, VIII, VII (middle right wall), Untitled III, II & I (right wall)



Installation Shot 4: Untitled 5 & 1 (far wall), Study IX, XIII, VIII, VII (near wall)



Installation Shot 5: Untitled 7 & 7 (left wall), Study X, XI & XII (middle wall), Study IX, XIII, VIII, VII (right wall)



Installation Shot 6: Untitled III, II, & I (from left)

Associated Research Projects and Activities

- **Masterclass**, hosted by Prof Tania Lewis and Dr Michelle Phillipov, University of Tasmania, 2016
- **Conference Paper**, Food Imaging: Visual Consumption Trends in Popular Food Media, *Food Politics: From the Margins to the Mainstream*, University of Tasmania, 2016
- **Decoding Visual Excess**, Moonah Arts Centre, solo exhibition, 2016
- **Artist Talk**, Moonah Arts Centre, 2016
- **Imagining food art, aesthetics and design**, Academy Gallery, curated by Dr Malcom Bywaters, Dr Kim Lehman and Prof Jeff Malpas, 2017
- **Hound in the Hunt**, Museum of Old and New Art (Mona), Live painting experiment, workshops and panel discussion, 2016 / 17
- **Art? Art! Art...** Rosny Barn Gallery, curated by Dr Jane Deeth, 2017
- **Eutick Sill Life Award**, Project Contemporary Artspace, 2017
- **STILL: National Still Life Award**, Coffs Harbour Regional, 2017/18
- **Workshop**, for Shenton College, 2018
- **Monuments to the Everyday**, ArtSpace at Realm, curated by Emily Jones, 2018
- **Published Journal Article**, Taylor, N., and Keating, M. 2018, Contemporary food imagery: Food porn and other visual trends. *Communication Research and Practice* 4(3). DOI: 10.1080/22041451.2018.1482190

Curriculum Vitae

BORN

1979 Hobart, Tasmania

EDUCATION

2015 - 2018 PhD Candidate, Creative Arts, University of Tasmania

2014 Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours Research (First Class)

2007 Dean's Roll of Excellence

2006 Bachelor of Fine Arts

The University of Tasmania - Centre for the Arts

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *Re-contextualising the Spectacle of Online Gastronomy: A Studio Investigation into Contemporary Food Imaging*, Plimsoll Gallery
- 2016 *Decoding Visual Excess*, Moonah Arts Centre, Hobart
- 2014 *Best Before*, Michael Reid Sydney
- 2012 *Loved to Death*, Michael Reid at Elizabeth Bay, Sydney
- 2010 *Dead to the World*, Michael Reid at Elizabeth Bay, Sydney
- 2009 *Homesick*, Mossgreen Gallery, Melbourne
- 2008 *Six New Works*, Despard Gallery, Hobart
Culture Made Easy, Linden: Centre for Contemporary Arts, Melbourne
- 2007 *The Suburban Vernacular*, Mossgreen Gallery, Melbourne
Portrait: New Drawings by Nathan Taylor, Despard Gallery, Hobart
- 2005 *Recent Paintings*, Brian Moore Gallery, Sydney
- 2003 *Love & Concrete*, Despard Gallery, Hobart
- 2000 *Photographic Memory*, Foyer Installation Gallery, Hobart
Reminiscence, Little Space Gallery, Hobart College, Hobart

CONFERENCES & RESEARCH PROJECTS

- 2016 Food Politics: From the Margins to the Mainstream, Conference paper, University of Tasmania, Hobart
Hound in the Hunt, MONA, Painting Exhibition / Experiment, Hobart, Tasmania

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *Monuments to the Everyday*, ArtSpace at Realm, Melbourne
- 2017 *Art? Art! Art...* The Barn at Rosny Farm, Hobart
Imagining food: Art, Aesthetics and Design, Academy Gallery, University of Tasmania
10 Years of EMSLA, Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery, Coffs Harbour
- 2015 *The Salon*, Scott Livesey Galleries, Melbourne
Pop-up Exhibition, M Contemporary, Sydney

- 2014 *The Colonial to the Personal*, The Old Boys Gallery, Christ Church Grammar School, Perth
Honours Examination Exhibition, Plimsoll Gallery, Tasmanian College for the Arts, Hobart
- 2013 *Australian Landscape: Present in the Now*, Michael Reid Berlin, Germany
Century of Aesthetics, Little Space Gallery, Hobart College
- 2012 *Murr-ma*, Jamushek, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, Germany
Linden Postcard Show, Linden Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
- 2011 *Red*, Despard Gallery, Hobart
- 2010 *Melbourne Art Fair Preview Show*, Michael Reid at Elizabeth Bay, Sydney
Kodak Salon, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne
Artist Stable Group Show, Mossgreen Gallery, Melbourne
- 2009 *ArtSale@TMAG*, Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, Hobart
Here / Now, Mossgreen Gallery, Melbourne
- 2008 *21st Annual Summer Show*, Despard Gallery, Hobart
Metro 5 Art Award, Benalla Regional Gallery, Benalla
- 2007 *20th Annual Summer Show*, Despard Gallery, Hobart
New Gallery Launch, Mossgreen Gallery, Melbourne
What ever I like... Despard Gallery Anniversary exhibition, Hobart
- 2006 *Summer Group Show*, Mossgreen Gallery, Melbourne
Melbourne Art Fair, Stand C42, Royal Exhibition Centre, Despard Gallery
- 2005 *Artist Stable Launch*, Mossgreen Gallery, Melbourne
- 2004 *Melbourne Art Fair*, Stand 55, Royal Exhibition Centre, Despard Gallery
Salon: Tasmanian Group Exhibition, Peter Lane Gallery, Woollahra
- 2003 *16th Annual Summer Show*, Despard Gallery, Hobart
- 2002 *A Baroque Christmas*, 15th Annual Christmas Exhibition, Despard Gallery
Off the Rack, Despard Gallery, Hobart
- 2001 *14th Annual Christmas Exhibition*, Despard Gallery, Hobart
Emerging Artist Exhibition, Despard Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania
To Be Announced ... Little Space Gallery, Hobart College, Hobart
Raw, Long Gallery, Salamanca, Hobart
- 2000 *Salsa: 13th Annual Christmas Exhibition*, Despard Gallery, Hobart
- 1999 *Palate to Palette*, Elizabeth Street, Hobart
- 1998-99 *The Summer Show*, Entrepot Gallery, Hobart
- 1997 *Art Rage*, Queen Victoria Museum Launceston
- 1996 *Art Rage*, Queen Victoria Museum Launceston & Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

COMMISSIONS

- 2011 Portrait of His Excellency The Honourable Peter Underwood AC &
 Mrs Underwood
- 2002 Mural for the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land Council Education Centre

COLLECTIONS

Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery
Maatsuyker Collection
Private Collections Nationally

GRANTS & SCHOLARSHIPS

- 2015 Australian Postgraduate Award (APA)
- 2007 Recipient, Janet Holmes à Court Artists' Grant
- 2006 Recipient, Marten Bequest Traveling Scholarship
- 2003 Artist Development Grant, Arts Tasmania
 Industry Development Grant, Arts Tasmania

BOOK & PUBLICATIONS

- 2018 Taylor, N. and Keating, M. (2018). Contemporary food imagery: Food
 porn and other visual trends. *Communication Research and Practice*
 4(3). DOI: 10.1080/22041451.2018.1482190
- 2012 *Nathan Taylor: Poetics of excess*, Artist Monograph (2001 - 2012),
 Emily Cloney & Michael Reid

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS & AWARDS

- 2017 Finalist, Still: National Still Life Award, Coffs Harbour Regional
 Gallery
 Finalist, Eutick Memorial Still Life Award, Project Contemporary
 Artspace, Wollongong
- 2015 Finalist, City of Albany Art Prize, Albany, Western Australia
- 2014 Finalist, John Leslie Art Prize, Gippsland Art Gallery
- 2013 Finalist, Eutick Memorial Still Life Award, Coffs Harbour Regional
 Gallery
 Finalist, Mount Eyre Art Prize, Sydney
- 2012 Winner, Eutick Memorial Still Life Award, Coffs Harbour Regional
 Gallery
 Finalist, Geelong Contemporary Art Prize, Geelong Gallery, Victoria
 Finalist, John Fries Memorial Prize, Sydney
 Finalist, City of Hobart Art Prize, Hobart
- 2011 Finalist, John Fries Memorial Prize, Sydney
 Finalist, Corangamarah Art Prize, Victoria
 Finalist, Mount Eyre Vineyard Art Prize, Sydney

- 2010 Nominated for Redlands Westpac Art Prize, Sydney – Highly Commended
 Finalist, Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship
 Finalist, Fletcher Jones Art Prize, Geelong Gallery, Victoria
 Finalist, CLIP Award, Perth Centre for Photography, Western Australia
 Finalist, Mount Eyre Vineyard Art Prize, Sydney
- 2009 Finalist, City of Hobart Art Prize, Hobart
- 2008 Finalist, The Corangamarah Art Prize, Victoria
 Finalist, METRO 5 Art Award, Melbourne
 Finalist, Tasmanian Youth Portraiture Prize
- 2007 Finalist, RIPE Art & Australia / ANZ Private Bank Contemporary Art Award
- 2003 Finalist, The Hutchins Art Prize, Hobart
- 2002 Finalist, METRO 5 Art Award, Melbourne
- 1997 Awarded Art Production Prize, Hobart
 Awarded Ian McDonald Memorial Prize, Hobart

SELECTED MEDIA

- 2016 The Mercury, Andrew Harper, Arts, Tas Weekend, 3 – 4 December
- 2015 Apocrypha Art Magazine, Jave, Artist Profile, Issue 24, Mexico
- 2014 The Art Life, Sharne Wolff, Exhibition profile, 21st November
 Art Almanac, Exhibition Brief, December / January Issue, Page 55
 Belle Magazine, Arts Page, December / January
- 2013 Art Monthly, Leigh Summers, Issue 262, August, page 46
- 2012 Sydney Morning Herald, Spectrum, 8th / 9th September, Page 16
 The Art Life, Andrew Frost, Exhibition profile, 14th September
 Art Almanac, Exhibition profile, September Issue
 Belle Magazine, Anne-Maree Sargeant, Right Now Art, October / November, page 62
 Australian Art Review, Profile, Jeremy Eccles, May / April
 Photo Realism, PhD thesis, Helmut Rauch, Kunstuniversität Linz, Austria
 Belle Magazine, Tanya Buchanan, Belle Reader Event, June / July, page 93
 Belle Magazine, Belle Reader Event, February / March, page 110
- 2011 Sun Herald, Culture, Andrew Taylor, 7th August
 Belle Magazine, Anne-Maree Sargeant, Right Now Art, June / July, page 56
 Australian Art: Who, when, what & how much? Emily Cloney & Michael Reid
 Belle Magazine, Our Times, April / May, page 60
- 2010 Artist Profile Magazine, Profile, Issue 13

- The Australian, Arts, Out & About, Bridget Cormack, 3rd November
Page 16
- The Drum Media, Front Row Arts, Bethany Small, 2nd November,
Page 67 & 71
- The Mercury, Gill Vowles, 12th November, Page 7
- The Weekend Australian, Pulse of the Nation, Teresa Ooi, 13th,
November, Page 10
- Sydney Morning Herald, Spectrum, Lynne Dwyer, 13th / 14th
November, Page 13
- Nine to Five, 22nd November, Issue 1122, On The Wall
- ‘Nine to Five 15th November, Issue 1121, What’s On
- The Daily Telegraph, 13th November
- The Art Market Monitor, Michael Reid, 27th October
- 2009 Television Article, Sky News, Your Money Your Call, Michael Reid &
David Cook
- Art Almanac, Exhibition profile, September Issue
- The Saturday Mercury, Inside Stories, 20th June, page 7
- Sydney Morning Herald, James Cockington, 25th March, page 3
- Australian Art Collector, 50 Most Collectable Artists, Issue #47
- The Apple, TMAAgots, Sixth Issue, Autumn
- 2008 Radio Interview, 936 ABC Radio Hobart, Annie Warburton
- Radio Interview, Edge FM, Wayne Brookes
- The Art Market Report, Editor’s Choice, Issue #30, page 42
- The Mercury, Gallery Watch, Clyde Selby, Review, 15th November,
page 8
- Sunday Tasmanian, Penny Thow, Sunday, 2nd November, page 5
- Art Almanac, Exhibition profile, November Issue
- Australian Art Collector, Judith Abell, TasWrap, Issue #46, page 318
- The Age, Metro, Ross Moore, 22nd August, page 17
- The Age, A2, Ashley Crawford, 16th August, page 22
- Artist Profile, Must See, Issue #4, page 97
- The Age, A2, Nicole Bittar, 12th July, page 8
- Moreland Leader, Art, David Stockman, 9th June, page 24
- Moreland Community News, Pinar Gencturk, 10th June, page 9
- 2007 The Financial Review, Lyndall Crisp, Arts, 15th & 16th December,
page 27
- The Mercury, Gallery Watch, Clyde Selby, Review, 1st December,
page 8
- Portrait: New drawings by Nathan Taylor, Catalogue essay, Wayne
Brookes
- Art Almanac, Exhibition profile, September Issue
- The Age, A2, Megan Backhouse, 22nd September, page 20
- The Age, Metro, Megan Backhouse, 15th August, page 17
- Suburban Vernacular, Catalogue Essay, Ashley Crawford

- 2006 The Australian Art Market Report, Issue #20, Winter
- 2005 The Wentworth Courier, Collector, 30th November, page 80
 The Australian Art Market Report, Issue #18, Summer, page 28
 The Age, Metro, Megan Backhouse, 26th October, page 19
 Nathan Taylor: Concrete Poetics, Kit Wise, Recent Paintings, Brian Moore Gallery, Sydney ISBN 0-9757024-3-2
- 2004 The Financial Review, Lyndall Crisp, Arts, 7th October, page 51
 State of the Arts, Laura Murray, October – December
 Melbourne Art Fair - Despard Gallery, Steven Joyce, Despard Gallery, Hobart
- 2003 Television Article, 'Love This Place', Southern Cross Television
 The Saturday Mercury, Joerge Andersch, Review, 22nd November, page 78
 The Mercury, Wendy Kennedy, Article, 17th November, page 24
 The Mercury, Meryl Naidoo, Article, 31st October, page 33
- 2002 The Mercury, Article, 20th December, page 19
- 2001 The Saturday Mercury, Joerge Andersch, Review, 23rd June, page 36
 Australian Art Collector, Issue #17, July – September, page 46
 Radio Interview, 936 ABC Radio Hobart, Tim Cox

ARTIST TALKS & WORKSHOPS

- 2018 Shenton College
- 2016 Moonah Arts Centre
 Friends' School
- 2014 University of Tasmania
 Mount Carmel College
 Sandy Bay Infant School
- 2013 St Michael's Collegiate School
- 2012 Belle Magazine Artist Dinner
- 2011 Island Art Collection
- 2010 University of Tasmania
 Hobart College
 Friends' School

